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SOVIET INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND
IMPLICATIONS UPON WITHDRAWAL

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A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

Khalid Nawaz Khan, Major, Pakistan Army
B.A./B.S.C., University of Baluchistan, 1986

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1990

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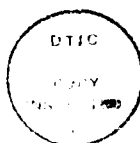
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This study discusses the geo-strategic importance of Afghanistan in the context of overall Soviet strategy in Southwest Asia. Considered as a Soviet 'backyard' in the past, Afghanistan sprang to limelight in 1979 following the Soviet invasion. After nearly a decade of occupation, the Soviet Union withdrew its military forces from Afghanistan in a bold and unexpected move. This action not only stunned but also confounded the world with regards to the actual motive behind the withdrawal. Though, undoubtedly, the Soviet policy in Afghanistan has received a setback, it cannot be termed as fatal. Indeed, in the long run, the Soviets tend to gain rather than lose in Afghanistan and in the Southwest Asian region as a whole.

The thesis, therefore, seeks to determine the course of the future Soviet strategy in Afghanistan in wake of changed circumstances following the withdrawal. Additionally, the impact of the withdrawal on Pakistan and Iran, the two frontline states, is also examined.

The study concludes that the Soviets have not abandoned their interests in Afghanistan but will, in the future, pursue the same goals and objectives through a more discreet, cost effective and indirect approach. Soviet hostility toward Pakistan could assume dangerous proportions for the latter, while Soviet influence in Iran is expected to receive a boost as a result of the withdrawal.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"My last words to you, my son and successor, are:
Never Trust the Russians."¹

King Abdur Rahman Khan
Kabul (1901)

BACKGROUND

The withdrawal of Soviet combat troops from Afghanistan in 1989 under the provisions of the Geneva Accords marked an end to the only episode of sustained foreign occupation in Afghanistan's modern history. Western observers, through hastily drawn and overly optimistic conclusions, termed this dramatic event a fundamental Soviet shift away from the totalitarian and expansionist policies of the past. Others labelled it an outright defeat.

However, a closer examination of hard realities unfurls a different story. Though a combination of various factors - political, military, economic, and domestic - did indeed trigger the withdrawal, the situation at the time in Afghanistan was far from being desperate for the Soviets. Although the Afghan resistance, supported by the USA, China, and Pakistan, controlled 75 percent of the countryside, it was clearly within Moscow's power to maintain the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) regime's control of the

capital and most of the other major cities and highways, as well as at least nominal authority over the rural areas.² Neither was the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan a major drain on resources. The occupation force never exceeded 3-4 percent of overall Soviet force strength, while defense expenditures remained a modest one to two percent of the annual Soviet defense budget.³

Other factors also supported a continued Soviet presence in Afghanistan: a Soviet departure would mean the loss of all the regional geo-strategic benefits that Moscow had gained by its military presence astride the eastern and western flanks of Iran and Pakistan, less than 300 miles from the Arabian Sea. Undeniably, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan provided an improved regional geo-strategic position, and a greater ability to exploit, politically and militarily, whatever opportunities might arise in the region; the Kremlin's abandonment of the PDPA government would result in a loss of credibility among its other client states; the withdrawal could adversely affect, in the mid- to long-term, the stability of the Soviet Central Asia lying across Afghanistan's northern border; and finally, the pullout of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, without having totally subdued the rebels, would mean enormous international humiliation, a tangible demonstration of the USSR's inability to impose its will on a small and backward country on its border.⁴

Yet, despite the convincing logic behind these arguments, the Soviet Union opted to withdraw just the same. The Gorbachev leadership assessed the costs of leaving Afghanistan, enormous as they were, lesser than the costs of a protracted occupation. Indeed, Gorbachev's accession to power in 1985 led to a dramatic turn of events. His widely publicized 'new thinking' is a sophisticated, pragmatic, and realistic approach to check and reverse the Soviet Union's decline, at home and abroad.⁵ Though, the fate of this economic "restructuring" will be primarily determined by internal Soviet dynamics, the need for major western economic and technological assistance, and the creation of a peaceful international climate to allow the Soviet Union to concentrate its attention on its formidable challenges, will play a crucial role.

The Afghan war was a negation of this concept and Gorbachev immediately realized that as long as the war went on, Perestroika could not attain credibility with the United States and the west. Thus, Afghanistan was specifically selected by the Soviets to demonstrate their new image - that of a peace loving, pro-disarmament nation seeking economic modernization - to the world. The Soviets stressed that conflicts would not be resolved by force but through peaceful political means. The Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze emphasized, this theme during the Afghan negotiations. He said, "We regard

the Geneva agreements as the FIRST EXAMPLE of a peaceful solution of regional conflicts on the basis of principles of new thinking" (emphasis added).⁶

The Soviet Union thus exploited the opportunity offered by the Geneva Accords to effect an honorable exit from an increasingly embarrassing situation in Afghanistan. The withdrawal not only improved its tarnished image internationally, but also brightened the prospects of improved relations with the United States, China, and the Muslim world. Ironically, the withdrawal also granted increased legitimacy to the PDPA regime and at the same time effectively created major rifts within the resistance by depriving the latter of a common, atheist enemy.

The withdrawal, in essence, was a dramatic step taken to provide credibility to Gorbachev's agenda of "new thinking". However, does this mean abandonment of Soviet goals in Afghanistan or pursuance of the same goals through different, more sophisticated, discreet and cost effective means? Even after the withdrawal, Afghanistan continues to be in a state of war. Five million refugees are still in Pakistan and Iran, and the massive Soviet political and economic control over Afghanistan stays firmly in position. In view of the changed international political environment, what are the future prospects for Afghanistan? Is the withdrawal a tactical retreat in order to attain long-term strategic goals in the region?

What strategy will be followed with regards to the other front line regional states of Pakistan and Iran? And, finally, what are the chances of a resistance victory?

RESEARCH QUESTION

Keeping in view the Soviet interests in the Southwest Asian region, what will be the course of future Soviet strategy in Afghanistan in wake of changed circumstances following the withdrawal?

DEFINITIONS

*Jihad: A struggle for a righteous cause (greater Jihad). Holy War against non-believers or aggressors (lesser Jihad).

*Mujahideen: Muslim warriors who wage Jihad.

*Loya Jirga: Great assembly. The supreme Afghan political institution. A national assembly of tribal leaders and representatives from every part of the country.

*Khad: Afghan secret police trained by the Soviet KGB. Also known as WAD.

*Saur Revolution: The coup that brought the Communists to power in Afghanistan on 28 April 1978. In the Afghan lunar calendar, Saur is the month that begins on 21 April of the Gregorian calendar.

*Basmachi: Anti-Bolshevik Central Asian rebels who fought to gain independence from the USSR in the 1920s-1930s. Literally, "bandits".⁷

*Durand Line: The boundary drawn in 1893, running through the tribal lands between Afghanistan and British territories; it now marks the boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was named after Sir Henry Durand. The line, since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, has remained a source of friction between the government of Pakistan and Afghanistan because of the latter's claim that the line was arbitrarily drawn by the British and hence incorporated part of Afghani territory into what is now Pakistan. The Pashtun tribe lives on either side of the line.

*Pashtunistan Issue: The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan; there are between 6 and 7 million of them in Afghanistan and almost as many in Pakistan. When the British moved out of India, the Afghan government hoped that the Pashtuns living in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) would be given a chance to choose between being independent or becoming part of Afghanistan. NWFP, being part of the British Indian Empire, was given the option of joining either India or Pakistan. The Pashtuns, being Muslim, overwhelmingly voted in favor of becoming a part of Pakistan. The Afghans claim NWFP on ethnic and historic grounds and thus, the issue has remained a source of friction between

the two countries. The Soviets, to gain Afghan favor, have always supported their claim and have exploited this issue on a number of occasions to ensure the continued reliance of Afghanistan on the Soviet Union.

LIMITATIONS

This research will have the inherent limitation of forecasting into the future on the basis of past historical facts and contemporary (at times, fast moving) events.

The research will be limited to the Soviet strategy in Afghanistan and the southwest Asian region.

Unclassified material will form the basis of this research.

ASSUMPTIONS

The research will be based on the assumption that, despite the significant changes taking place in eastern Europe, the USSR will remain a credible superpower.

ENDNOTES

¹ J. Bruce Amstutz, The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation, 1986, p. 3.

² Tad Daley, "Afghanistan and Gorbachev's Global Foreign Policy, Asian Survey, May 1989, p. 496.

³ Alex Alexiev, "The War in Afghanistan: Soviet Strategy and the State of Resistance," DTIC, Nov 1984, p. 2.

⁴ Daley, p. 496.

⁵ Graham T. Allison, Jr., "Testing Gorbachev," Foreign Affairs, Fall 1988, p. 20.

⁶ Daley, p. 505.

⁷ Rosanne Klass, Afghanistan the Great Game Revisited, 1987, p. 457.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

General

The Soviet decision to withdraw its combat troops from Afghanistan under the provisions of the 1988 Geneva Accords, though welcomed, stunned and, at the same time, perplexed the world.

Though mired down in Afghanistan, the Soviet were not close to being defeated militarily. Military and economic costs were bearable, domestic pressure could have been contained, and international censure, with the passage of time, had lessened in intensity. By all accounts, the Soviets had come to stay and, in the process, ensure the continuity of the Brezhnev doctrine.

Yet, by 15 February 1989, the last of the Soviet combat troops had crossed over the Amu Darya back into the Soviet Union. This move confounded the world in general and the West in particular, and gave rise to a number of pertinent questions: (1) had the Soviet Union abandoned its interests and role in Afghanistan? (2) what had, in essence, prompted the withdrawal, especially after the Soviets had gained considerable geo-strategic advantages as a result of the invasion? (3) and finally, does Perestroika envisage a more benign Soviet policy in

Southwest Asia, particularly in relation to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran?

The author adopted a historical approach in attempting to answer these and other questions concerning the implications upon the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Sequence of Study

An analysis of the withdrawal would be impossible without first examining, in depth, Soviet interests in Southwest Asia. This involves identifying key Soviet objectives and goals in the region and the application of policy in attaining these goals. It is here that the geo-strategic importance of Afghanistan emerges as a key element of Soviet foreign policy formulation. Afghanistan acts as a stepping stone in the Soviet drive to the oil rich Persian Gulf, acts as a base for projection of Soviet power - political, economic, military, and ideological - in the region, and provides the vital buffer next to the vulnerable southern flank of the USSR.

Having identified Soviet Union's interests in the Southwest Asian region, Chapter IV will review the components of Afghan national power. The geography of Afghanistan, with its rugged and mountainous terrain, has for centuries been instrumental in deterring prolonged occupation of the country. This fact, combined with the peculiar nature of the Afghan society - based on a fierce

sense of independence - stands out as being one of the decisive factors in the Soviet military's ultimate withdrawal. The divisive nature of the society, traditionally tribal in nature, adds to the dynamics of the problem - for the invaders as well as for the Afghans themselves. This chapter, thus, dwells in detail on the geography, culture, society and economy of Afghanistan in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Afghans, and incentives held for the Soviets in the form of political and economic exploitation and subjugation.

From this base emerges Chapter V which discusses in detail the historic involvement of Russia (and later, the Soviet Union) in Afghanistan. The 'Great Game' - the power struggle between Czarist Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - and the subsequent dominance of Russian influence in Afghanistan are the salient features on which the chapter is based. The Soviet involvement and penetration in all fields - economic, political, social, and military - and the virtual transformation of Afghanistan into a Soviet satellite lay the foundation for Chapter VI.

The invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was the first time the Soviets had conducted a full scale invasion of a country outside eastern Europe. This chapter will analyze the causes and effects of the Soviet invasion and occupation. This discussion will lead on to the factors that prompted the Soviets to withdraw.

The Seventh and final chapter analyzes the implications of the Soviet withdrawal on the future Soviet policy towards Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Based on a historical analysis of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, the Soviet interests in the region, and the present reformation in progress inside the USSR, a reasonably sound prediction on future Soviet policy in the region can be made. The possible repercussions of Perestroika radically altering the Soviet goals and objectives in the region or as an instrument for gaining time in order to pursue existing goals through different means - are analyzed with regard to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

Sources

This research project is based on unclassified, currently available literature on Afghanistan and Soviet foreign policy. Personal experience, knowledge, and observations of the Mujahideen and the resistance movement helped considerably in formulating a balanced view from diverse sources. In essence, the interaction of history, Soviet objectives in the region and fast moving contemporary developments in the world today lead to a reasonably sound judgement on the future of Soviet policies in Afghanistan and the Southwest Asian region.

LITERATURE SURVEY

A considerable amount of literature exists on the subject. Though the sources are highly diversified - from the ultra-right to the ultra-left - the weight of the source material clearly emanates from the rightist or western category. The literature can be divided into four distinct categories.

Soviet Policy in Southwest Asia

The Soviet interest in Afghanistan and the Southwest Asian region is not a product of the crises of the seventies and eighties but has been prevalent for a long time. Hence, a considerable amount of material is available on the subject. Fred Halliday's Soviet Policy in the Arc of Crisis, Carol R. Saivetz's The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the Eighties, and David G. Hagland's Superpower Involvement in the Middle East provide extensive information on Soviet interests in the region and trace the evolution and growing sophistication of Soviet foreign policy in the seventies and the eighties. The Persian Gulf and the West: The Dilemmas of Security by Charles A. Kupchan, Superpower Detente: A Reappraisal by Mike Bowker and Phil Williams, and Focused Comparison of Soviet and American National Interests in Southwest Asia, a thesis presented by John M. O'Sullivan, provide a well balanced view of the competing interests of the USA and USSR in the region. These sources also identify

Soviet global policy as being anchored in opportunism and not ideology. U.S. Strategic Interests in Southwest Asia is a collection of essays recommending a coherent U.S. policy for the region as a result of the rapid advances made by the Soviets in the seventies. Zbigniew Brzezinski's Game Plan assesses the U.S.-Soviet global context through a focus on the Eurasian land mass and gives particular attention to the role of Afghanistan in Soviet strategic planning. The above mentioned source material is invaluable in understanding the Soviet policy for Southwest Asian region within the broader context of Soviet global policy and policy toward developing countries.

Afghanistan

The literature on general Afghan history and background is essential in order to understand the origins and complex character of the Afghans, to include their peculiar traits, culture and social system. Vartan Gregorian's The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan, Louis Dupree's Afghanistan and Sir Olaf Caroe's The Pathans stand out as principal source material on the Afghan society and politics.

Soviet Invasion and Occupation Period

The most extensive category of literature covers the period of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, the

invasion and the subsequent occupation. This literature provides adequate background information pertaining to the Soviet strategy towards Afghanistan during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the "Great Game" period). However, the focus of the literature is on the modern day Soviet infiltration of Afghanistan, beginning in the year 1952 when the latter turned completely to the Soviets. The books contain exhaustive information on the extent of the Soviet domination of Afghanistan - politically, economically and militarily - prior to the invasion. Though the Soviet military strategy and operations to control the insurgency receive great attention, in-depth analysis of the resistance composition, strengths and weaknesses is not as well covered. Again, the emphasis is mainly on the aspect of the possibilities of the Soviet withdrawal and less on the shape of Afghanistan's future after the Soviet withdrawal. Books that deserve special attention in this category are J. Bruce Amstutz's Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation; Henry S. Bradsher's Afghanistan and the Soviet Union; Thomas T. Hammond's Red Flag Over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion and the Consequences; Rosanne Klass's Afghanistan - The Great Game Revisited; and J. J. Collins' The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan - A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy.

Implications Upon Withdrawal

This group of literature falls in the time period from the signing of the Geneva Accords on 14 April 1988 to date. Being a fairly current event, only a few books have been devoted to it so far. However, major periodicals and newspapers have dealt extensively with the signing of the accords, political and military developments following the Soviet withdrawal, and the future of Afghanistan. These periodicals also relate the concept of Perestroika to the developments in the region. The nature and fragmentation of the Afghan society as a result of the decade long Soviet occupation and the prospects of peace for the future are well covered.

This category of literature also carries out detailed discussion of the impact felt in Pakistan and Iran in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. This includes friendly Soviet overtures to Iran and increased hostility towards Pakistan. Of special mention in this category of literature are Saikal and Maley's The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan and periodicals such as Foreign Affairs, ORBIS, Third World Quarterly, Global Affairs, Strategic Review, World Policy Journal, Foreign Policy, and Defense and Diplomacy. Articles of note have appeared in the Time, Newsweek, and New York Times. The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, a periodical containing important clippings from the Soviet press is recommended to form a balanced view.

CHAPTER III

SOVIET INTERESTS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

The geographical contiguity of Southwest Asia to Russia (and later the Soviet Union) has always presented mixed blessings to the latter. In a broad context, the region offers lucrative opportunities which, if realized, possess the potential to place the Soviet Union in an enviably strong position against the U.S.-led Western Alliance. However, on the other hand, manipulation of this unpredictable and volatile area by Britain, the United States and China has always produced serious security repercussions, and even threatened the very integrity of the Soviet homeland.

According to the traditional Soviet view, the USSR has a belt of Warsaw Pact allies on the West, and China - hostile, but not an immediate threat - on the east. In between lies a central belt where no such strategic certainty exists; a line running over three thousand miles along the Black Sea, the Turkish and Iranian frontiers and then across the Afghan Plains to the Wakhan Corridor where the USSR, China and Afghanistan all meet. What the West sees as the "northern tier" of Southwest Asia is, for the Soviets, the "southern tier". This tier is the line of countries whose international and internal orientations are of prime concern to them, just as the politics of the Caribbean and Central American countries are to the United

States.¹ Fred Halliday, commenting on the vulnerability of the Soviet southern flank and the active consolidation of its position by the West through the Truman (1947), Eisenhower (1957), Nixon (1969) and Carter (1980) administrations, points out that although oil is of vital importance to the west it remains a passing concern to the Soviets. However, from the Soviet perspective the region is a geographical reality that must be confronted forever.²

Indeed, this geographical reality is not a product of present conditions, but has deep historical roots. Interests in the region are also remarkably similar whether viewed from Czarist times or the present Soviet Communist state: expansionism (offensive interests) and security of the homeland (defensive interests).

Expansionist policies are a logical extension of Russia's ancient claims to a "manifest destiny" which have for centuries impelled it toward the Indian Ocean and more recently toward the oil resources of the Persian Gulf.³ Hegemonistic territorial maneuver in recent times includes encirclement of the People's Republic of China through the utilization of part of this region as the "back door."

Defensive interests include, a historic preoccupation with external security, especially fear of encirclement by hostile powers, and potential internal challenges. General interests include seizure of opportunities for economic imperialism, the spread of

ideology, support for Marxist-Leninist regimes and movements, and the establishment of a regional presence to set the global correlation of forces in their favor.

QUEST FOR WARM WATER PORTS

The acquisition of warm water ports has been an important Russian goal since the time of Peter the Great. J. J. Collins believes that since then changes in air transport, the naval balance and maritime technology have made the Soviet search for warm water ports less critical.⁴ M. S. Agwani, the author of Afghanistan in Crisis, writes, "The plain truth is that Soviets now possess a sizeable, modern and self-reliant navy whose efficacy does not depend on physical control of warm water ports."⁵ Accordingly, Soviet access to anchorages or bases at Aden, Socotra and on Dhalak Island in the Red Sea obviates the dangerous search for warm water ports in Iran or Pakistan.⁶ Although these arguments have merit, it would not be prudent to disregard historical ambition on the part of the Soviets. Physical possession of warm water ports, connected through an overland route to the Soviet mainland, could not only serve to accommodate the navy but would be invaluable in terms of power projection as well. Moreover, the unpredictability of the local regimes, coupled with uncertainties in the granting of basing and anchorage rights, may limit superpower options in crisis situations. Assertion of these interests might

entail occupation of the Iranian or Pakistani coastlines, with Afghanistan acting as the stepping stone, especially with regards to the former.

PERSIAN GULF RESOURCES

President Carter said in January 1980:

The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz - a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow.... The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil.⁷

The strategic significance of the Persian Gulf cannot be overemphasized with regards to both the offensive and defensive interests of the Soviet Union. Though the current oil situation in Soviet Union has not reached crisis proportions, strains have been felt on the Soviet economy. Because of geographical factors, it has benefitted the Soviet Union to import quantities of oil from Iran, and gas from Iran and Afghanistan, and thus to export more of its own production to European markets. Thus, despite the CIA's 1977 report that the USSR would soon become a net importer of oil, the Soviets are expected to exploit a favorable energy situation in their foreign policy dealings with the West in the 1990s.⁸

USSR influence over the flow of oil in the Persian Gulf, however, remains a middle range economic objective. From the West's perspective, Persian Gulf oil is of great

importance to the Western Alliance, accounting for nearly 66 percent of Japan's and 21 percent of Western Europe's oil imports.⁹ The significance of the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf in Soviet foreign policy, thus, must be viewed within the context of possible denial to the Western nations and Japan which are so dependent upon it. Jiri Valenta concludes that USSR control over oil flow in the region and its denial to the West, if necessary, have always remained a priority long-range economic interest.¹⁰

SECURITY OF FRONTIERS

From Czarist times, the Soviet Union retains a strong concern for the security of the homeland and an obsession about instability on its periphery. Throughout Russian and Soviet history, the search for defensible borders has led to the annexation of vast geographical areas. These moves, originally of a defensive character, led in several cases to clearly aggressive behaviour. Indeed, the country has on many occasions experienced foreign intervention. Russia was invaded by Mongols in the 13th century, by Napoleon in 1812, and twice by Europeans in the 20th century - 1918 and 1941. The last invasion was particularly devastating in terms of human losses when over twenty million Soviets lost their lives in the process of defending their homeland during the Great Patriotic War.

Thus, the conquest and the annexation of Transcaucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and the Central Asian states (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, and Tajikistan), during the later half of the nineteenth century, was a result of the Czarist Russia's desire to establish secure frontiers. Again, the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union in 1940, as a consequence of the Nazi-Soviet pact, was designed to improve the security of the USSR's western flank. The devastation wrought upon the Soviet homeland during the Second World War further deepened the Soviet leaders' feeling of encirclement, and formed the basis for the creation of buffer zones, wherever possible, around the borders of Soviet Union.

The system of Soviet national security consists of several barriers between the Russian lands and the perceived enemies. In the European part of the USSR, the non-Russian republics (the Baltic republics, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Moldavia and the Karelian republic) provide a buffer zone. East European client states could be regarded as the second barrier. In other areas buffer zones are somewhat less developed, although there are large parts of the borders which are either non-Russian republics (Transcaucasia and Central Asia) or allied states like Mongolia. The system of barriers obviously has weak points. The system is especially insecure in areas where the client state populations touch upon the

non-Russian populations. Soviet intervention in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) clearly demonstrated the unacceptability to the Soviets of potential "spillover effects" into the Soviet heartland from these client states.

An even greater threat is perceived in areas where the same people live on both sides of the border as in the Soviet southern republics (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) bordering Islamic states of Iran and Afghanistan. The growth of Central Asian nationalism as a destabilizing factor is a current and growing concern to the Soviet leadership. The demographics of the area also provide clear evidence that due to higher birthrates, at some point in the next century the non-Slav minorities will form the majority of the USSR's population.¹¹ According to a 1988 population census, the Muslim nationalities amounted to about 18% of the total Soviet population.¹² The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the entire Muslim world, and especially in Iran, sent tremors through the Soviet Union. Considering the commonality of religion, nationality and geography between the Muslim republics of southern USSR, Iran, and Afghanistan, the issue assumed great importance in Soviet decision making process.

CONTAINMENT OF U.S. INFLUENCE

Containment of foreign influence in this critical region has always formed the cornerstone of Russian and Soviet policy making process. The "Great Game" of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between Russia and Britain was played mainly in Afghanistan due to its geostrategic importance. While Britain was concerned about a Russian threat to India, the Russians suspected British designs to block Russia and dominate Southwest Asia. After the Second World War, the USA replaced Britain as the new foreign regional power. U.S. objectives in the region were to contain the Soviet Union, maintain open sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, and keep the oil flowing to the free world. When CENTO, consisting of the USA, UK, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey, was formed in 1955, (with Turkey serving as a link between NATO and CENTO) the circle of containment appeared complete to the Soviet Union. At that time, Afghanistan, which did not figure prominently in the eyes of USA, was desperately being courted by the USSR to prevent its inclusion in the pact aimed against the Soviet Union. Thus, Soviet aid to Afghanistan was largely designed to deny the USA another link in this chain as illustrated by Khrushchev in his memoirs:

The Americans were penetrating Afghanistan with the obvious purpose of setting up a military base..., we have earned the Afghans' trust and friendship and it hasn't fallen into the American's trap.¹³

Ever since, the cornerstone of Soviet foreign policy in the region has been the containment of U.S. influence while at the same time consolidating its own gains. Across the broad spectrum of the region, its client states include Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, South Yemen and Ethiopia. The last two are of particular importance due to the acquisition of basing and anchorage rights. Their strategic location in the Red Sea places them in close proximity to the Bab El Mandab from which oil passes through to Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.¹⁴ The Soviets have also made important breakthroughs in their relations with traditionally strong U.S. allies in the region like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and UAE. Though the balance of power in the region still favors the U.S., the Soviets, through their intense diplomatic maneuvers and increased presence in the Middle East, have greatly improved their strategic position. In December 1978, Henry Kissinger, testifying before the House of Representatives on the SALT II Treaty, talked about:

An unprecedented Soviet assault on the international equilibrium - the American geopolitical decline from Vietnam through Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen and Afghanistan had demoralized friends and emboldened enemies. These tactics, reinforced by a Soviet military buildup threatening the strategic, theater and conventional balances, are incompatible with any notion of detente or coexistence.¹⁵

THE CHINA FACTOR

Another major interest the USSR pursued in Southwest Asia was the containment and political encirclement of the People's Republic of China. Jiri Valenta considers this to be a core Soviet geostrategic interest.¹⁶ Indeed, the Sino-Soviet dispute has deep historic roots. The major differences are, however, more political and less ideological in character. As Walter Lippmann said in 1962:

It is the same conflict which existed when the Emperor of all the Russians and the Emperor of China were still on their thrones. It is a conflict of national interests between the Russians and the Chinese which has gone on for generations, and it is due to a collision between the Russians, expanding across Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, and the Chinese, expanding northward into Manchuria and Mongolia, across the path of the Russians.¹⁷

Though, by the seventies, the Soviets had achieved the status of a genuine superpower, they remained obsessed with the spectre of a strong China on their flank in the future. The Soviet policy was thus aimed at politically isolating China and preventing or at least postponing - the process of China acquiring a comparable superpower status. China's rapprochement with the United States and the West further deepened their suspicions with regards to future Chinese intentions.

Paul H. Borsuk, in his essay on "Soviet Foreign Policy and Security Problems and Policies," states:

The Soviets' success in forming an anti-Chinese alliance with Vietnam, build up of its forces in the Far East and its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan were

considered by the Soviets as being instrumental in containing China.¹⁸

The Chinese, on the other hand, condemn the Soviet moves as not defensive but offensive in character, aimed at outflanking and encircling China. According to Chinese geostrategic thinking, Soviet southern (southbound) strategy has two tiers: a land tier and a sea tier. In order to encircle China from the south, it attempted to build an uninterrupted arc of Soviet influence stretching from the Middle East and Southwest Asia through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. Southwest Asia served as the land bridge between these regions and the Indian Ocean the sea bridge. Due to its inability to deploy and project power far beyond its borders, and its lack of political influence in the Middle East, China could not deal with the Soviet presence and contain it farther away from its borders in the Middle East and Gulf regions. Thus, the importance of the land "stitch" between the Middle East and South Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan assumed critical importance as the traditional route of invasion and occupation of South Asia.

In addition to the Soviet naval dominance in the Indian Ocean, the other important elements in China's countercirclement strategy were Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁹ China feared that Pakistan would become the stepping stone to further Soviet expansion toward the Gulf and Middle East, or toward South and Southeast Asia.

This was rooted in the belief that control of Pakistan would give the USSR an avenue of attack into Xinjiang and Tibet from the south using the connecting road system built by China and Pakistan. Indeed, Jiri Valenta agrees that in the Soviet attempt to block Chinese influence in Southwest Asia and perhaps, ultimately to encircle the PRC, a Soviet dominated Afghanistan, an anti-Chinese India and a Pakistan, militarily and politically susceptible to the pressures of strong opponents on its periphery, provide the necessary ingredients.²⁰

SPREAD OF IDEOLOGY

The Soviet Union, in the seventies and early eighties, was ideologically committed to supporting what it saw as progressive forces in the world.²¹ The cultivation and advancement of Marxist-Leninist regimes and popular movements has been an objective pursued concurrently with the earlier mentioned interests. Despite the earlier sharp ideological differences that Islam has with Communism, the Soviet Union still managed to create pockets of Communist leaning states in the region. The two prime Marxist-Leninist regimes in power today are South Yemen and Afghanistan, and though Communism has made headway in these states "it has to go a long way before it is finally established and accepted by the majority."²² Still, support of these regimes and Leftist leaning movements remains an important point on

the Soviet foreign policy agenda. As Victor V. Grishin, a politburo member and the Moscow city party boss at the time said, "Socialist internationalism obliged us to help the Afghan people defend the April Revolution's gains."²³ This argument was in strict accordance with the Brezhnev doctrine:

When external and internal forces hostile to socialism try to turn the development of a given socialist country in the direction of restoration of the capitalist system, when a threat arises to the cause of socialism in any country - a threat to the security of the socialist commonwealth as a whole - this is no longer, merely a problem for that country's people, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist parties.²⁴

SUPER POWER ROLE IN THE REGION

Moscow covets the role of international broker such as it played in the 1965 Indo Pakistani War. The role enables it to portray itself as an above the board mediator, and aims at least at winning over one side. The current Iran Iraq conflict is a case in point where, exploiting the total absence of the USA from Iran, and the dependence of Iraq on Soviet military hardware, the Soviet Union started arming both sides so as to ensure that neither opponent gained a clear upper hand. By doing so, the Soviets retain the option of mediating an end to the war and capitalizing on what has been termed as the Tashkent Syndrome.²⁵

The strategy, frequently termed as "Pax Sovietica" is not without potential pitfalls. If either belligerent

perceives a shift in Soviet support for itself in favor of its opponent, Soviet hopes for a mediator role could be undermined completely. The current switch in Iran's favor, which could potentially harm the Soviet's relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait is counterbalanced by the ever prevalent theory that Iran remains the strategic prize in the region. A January 1987 statement in Izvestiia reveals that the Soviets envision themselves in a mediator's role: "As for the Soviet Union, it has acted and will act energetically in this direction [to end the war]. This policy is an integral part of the USSR's principled course."²⁶

The record of Soviet involvement in Southwest Asia suggests that Moscow's activities are guided by geopolitical considerations (concern for ports and strategic access); economic concerns (Persian Gulf oil for both offensive and defensive purposes, in addition to exploiting the mineral wealth of other states in the region such as natural gas from Afghanistan); and the all important security need to react against U.S./Chinese efforts to encircle the USSR to exploit its soft underbelly (southern USSR). Concurrent interests include exporting ideology and gaining influence in the region mainly by playing a mediator's role.

There is no doubt that the Soviet Union has a policy in Southwest Asia related both to its specific internal needs (economic and political) and to its search

for parity with the United States. However, it must be noted that the Soviet policy suffers from a number of constraints. These range from the instability and volatility of the region, coupled with unpredictability of the regimes in power, to the limited level of resources which it can deploy in pursuit of its foreign objectives.

Fred Halliday says:

Though the level has certainly increased in recent years, such an expansion in military capacity rather than any change in Soviet strategy, has made possible the military aid given to such states as Angola, Vietnam and Ethiopia. But the Russians are still constrained in what they can supply, particularly in the economic field. They are short of foreign exchange, deficient in modern technology and certainly cannot provide on a regular basis one of the major requirements - food.²⁷

Finally, the Russians want to achieve a permanent working relationship with the West: to avert war, to manage crisis situations and to derive maximum support for their own economic development programs.

However, despite these major constraints, the 1970s witnessed a series of Soviet 'triumphs' in the region: Vietnam in 1975, Angola in 1975-1976, Ethiopia in 1977, South Yemen and Afghanistan in 1978, and Cambodia in 1979. In addition there were unsuccessful leftist coups in the Sudan in 1976-1977 and Somalia in 1978. Basing and anchorage rights were secured in Mauritius, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau and South Yemen. These startling developments at the expense of U.S. power in the region compelled Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser

in the Carter Administration, to coin the phrase "Arc of Crisis" to denote the range of countries in Southwest Asia where the threat was posed. He went on to say:

An arc of crisis stretches along the shores of the Indian Ocean, with fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to U.S. threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political chaos could well be filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries.²⁸
(Emphasis added.)

The Economist talked of the "crumbling triangle" bounded by Kabul in Afghanistan, Ankara in Turkey and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.²⁹

It was less than a year later when these predictions were vindicated with the massive invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets. The next chapter will deal with the country itself, its geostrategic importance, and its special set of values and traditions.

ENDNOTES

¹ Fred Halliday, Soviet Policy in the Arc of Crisis, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, 1981, pp. 36-37.

² Ibid., p. 37.

³ Rosanne Klass, Afghanistan the Great Game Revisited, Freedom House, 1987, p. 38.

⁴ Joseph J. Collins, The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan - A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy, Heath and Company, 1986, p. 106.

⁵ M. S. Agwani, Afghanistan in Crisis, p. 14 as cited in Collins, p. 106.

⁶ Collins, p. 106.

⁷ State of Union Address, January 23, 1980.

⁸ Halliday, pp. 46, 48.

⁹ David G. Hagland, Superpower Involvement in the Middle East - Dynamics of Foreign Policy, 1985. West Germany has reduced its dependence on Middle East oil to only 13 percent. Japan at 66 percent and France at 36 percent remain uncomfortably reliant on Persian Gulf oil.

¹⁰ Jiri Valenta, "Soviet Policy Option," U.S. Strategic Interests in Southwest Asia, Praeger Publishers, 1982, p. 96.

¹¹ Halliday, p. 43. The population growth rate for European USSR in 1970-1979 period was 9% compared to 31% for Tajikistan, 30% for Uzbekistan and 22% for Armenia.

¹² The Europa Yearbook 1988 - A World Survey, Vol. II, Europa Publications, p. 2716.

¹³ N. S. Khrushchev, Khrushchev Memoirs, Boston: Little Brown, 1971, p. 508 as cited in Thomas T. Hammond, Red Flag Over Afghanistan - The Communist Coup, The Soviet Invasion and the Consequences, p. 23.

¹⁴ Charles A. Kupchan, The Persian Gulf and the West: The Dilemmas of Security, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985, p. 78.

¹⁵ The Economist, February 3, 1979 as cited in Halliday, p. 20.

- ¹⁶ Valenta, p. 96.
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- ¹⁹ Y. I. Vertzberger, China's Southwestern Strategy: Encirclement and Counterencirclement, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985, p. 6.
- ²⁰ Valenta, p. 105.
- ²¹ Halliday, p. 28.
- ²² Henry S. Bradsher, Afghanistan and Soviet Union, Duke University Press, 1985, p. 145.
- ²³ Moskovs Kaya Pravda, 6 February 1980, pp. 2-3 as cited in Henry Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, p. 157.
- ²⁴ Pravda, 13 November 1968, pp. 1-2 as cited in Bradsher, p. 137.
- ²⁵ Valenta, p. 107. A reference to the 1966 role of the USSR in mediating a peace agreement, in the city of Tashkent, between India and Pakistan after the 1965 War.
- ²⁶ Izvestia, 9 January 1987, p. 1 as cited in Carol R. Saivetz, The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980s, p. 99.
- ²⁷ Halliday, p. 30.
- ²⁸ Time, January 15, 1979 as cited in Halliday, p. 19.
- ²⁹ Halliday, p. 19.

CHAPTER IV

AFGHANISTAN

Turkistan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia...are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominance of the world.¹

- Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India 1899-1905)

Afghanistan has occupied a strategic position as a historic buffer state between east and west for hundreds of years.² Rosanne Klass observes:

So long as geography plays a role in history, Afghanistan will remain what it has been since prehistoric times -- the defense perimeter of the Indian subcontinent, crucial to access between the Eurasian land mass to the Indic plains, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. For 4,000 years no power that has controlled the mountains and passes of Afghanistan and wanted to move on southward has been prevented.³

Indeed, this remote, mountainous land has been a meeting point for cultures from the north, the west and the east as it developed into a "crossroads" for trade and commerce, civilizations and religions. It has also been described as a "highway of conquest" for migratory peoples and expanding empires.⁴ The 1979 Soviet invasion was only the latest of many incursions by external powers into Afghanistan. Alexander the Great led the Greeks into Afghanistan in 321 B.C. and thereafter there was a continuous flow of invaders and accompanying cultures. Nomadic tribes from Central Asia in 50 B.C., led by the Kushans, established an empire and promoted Buddhist and Hellenistic cultures. Mongols in the 13th century led by

Genghis Khan, Hulagu and Tamerlane terrorized the indigenous tribes and wrought wholesale destruction. Persian Safavids and Muslim Mughals from India competed for the control of Afghanistan in 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th and early twentieth centuries, the Russian and the British Indian Empire were involved in an intense power struggle for supremacy in Afghanistan in what Rudyard Kipling, in his book, Kim called 'The Great Game'.⁵ As a result of these invasions, Afghanistan shares linguistically, culturally, religiously and politically with the nations that it borders.

As invaders sought to dominate the area, mountainous tribes always resisted much the same as the Afghan resistance refused to accept Soviet occupation. Afghanistan, with its extremely barren and rugged terrain, and inhabited by fiercely independent people, is a country not easily dominated. This chapter will highlight the geographical, demographic and cultural, and economic aspects of Afghanistan in order to assess the contribution of each element to the ultimate geostrategic importance of Afghanistan.

GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Afghanistan is a land locked, mountainous country, which is bordered on the north by the three Muslim republics of the Soviet Union - Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan - for 1,500 miles; on the west by Iran (550

miles), on the south and east by Pakistan (1,500 miles) and on the extreme northeast by the People's Republic of China (50 miles). Afghanistan's most prominent topographical feature is the 700-mile Hindukush Range which runs east to west with normal elevations of 13,000 to 20,000 feet and peaks up to 25,000 feet. It divides the country's northern regions (Afghan Turkestan) from the major southern provinces of Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. Until 1933 there was no adequate direct road linking the Kabul and Kandhar provinces with northern Afghanistan.

The Wakhan Corridor in the Pamir mountains on the northeast is a thin strip of territory which has Pakistan in the south, the Soviet Union in the north and the People's Republic of China in the east. Of Afghanistan's four major river systems - Helmand, Amu Darya or Oxus (480 miles in length and forming the northern boundary with Soviet Union), Arius and Kabul - only Kabul has sufficient water to flow to the sea and that also as a tributary of the Indus.⁶

More than 80 percent of Afghanistan can be classified as desert or semi-desert, resulting in subsistence agriculture and herding as the principal occupations of the nearly 90 percent of the population who live in rural areas. The sheer ruggedness of terrain is also the principal cause for the gross underdeveloped communications infrastructure. Afghanistan is entirely dependent on road transportation because of a virtual

absence of railroads. Of a total of 11,626 miles of road, only 1,850 miles are paved, 2,444 graveled and the remainder (almost 66 percent) improved or unimproved tracks.⁷ The main hard surface road system is a circular network which connects Kabul to Mazar Sharif in the north, Kandhar in the south and Herat in the west. The crown jewel of this network is the more than mile-long Salang Tunnel constructed by the Soviets in the early 1960s.⁸ The tunnel, which breaches the Hindukush and connects Kabul to the northern portion of the country, is a key chokepoint along the 270-mile route connecting Kabul with Termez, a border town in the north.

The Durand Line forms the physical barrier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Generally, it follows the line of watershed over the mountains separating the two countries. A number of passes permit movement from either side. Khyber, Nawa, Gomal and Peiwar Kobal are passes of great value and derive importance from their past use as historical routes for invasions into Indian Subcontinent.

The total size of Afghanistan is 260,000 square miles, roughly equivalent in size to the state of Texas. The climate features hot, dry summers and extremely cold winters. Major population centers are the cities of Kabul (800,000, Kandhar (230,000), Herat (150,000) and Mazar Sharif (100,000).⁹

DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCE

Afghanistan's geographical position and demographic profile have exerted a decisive influence on its political history. Although there are no scientific estimates of Afghanistan's population, a 1979 Afghan government estimate put the population at 15.54 million.¹⁰ The heterogeneity of its population is reflected in the variety of ethnic groups which inhabit present day Afghanistan.

The largest and politically most dominant groups are the Pushtuns (Pathans or Afghans) with an estimated population of 8 million. The single most important Afghan tribe is the Abdali or Durrani tribe which, traditionally, between 1747 and 1978 held the central power. The second largest Afghan tribe is the Ghilzai, inhabiting the region between Kandhar and Ghazni. Historically, the Durrani and the Ghilzais have been engaged in a fierce power struggle which after 1747 was decided in favor of the former by Ahmed Shah Abdali.¹¹ When the Durrani monarchy was toppled in 1978 the Ghilzais had their revenge as the bulk of the Communist Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was comprised of the Ghilzai and the eastern Pushtuns. Ironically, the majority of the seven party leaders based in Pakistan are either Ghilzai (Hekmatyar, Sayyaf, Nabi) or eastern Pushtuns (Khaless), while Mojaddidi and Gailani have family links with the Ghilzai. There is no 'pure bred Durrani' in the Mujahideen Provisional Government and as such both the

Kabul regime and the Peshawar based alliance are mainly Ghilzais.¹²

The Pushtuns inhabit the eastern, central and southwestern regions of Afghanistan. Most of this region borders Pakistan, which has its own 6.5 million Pushtuns.¹³

The Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Estimated at about 3.5 million, they live chiefly around Kabul and in the valleys of the Panjshir River and the Upper Oxus.¹⁴

The Uzbeks, the largest Turkic speaking group in Afghanistan, are estimated to number 1.5 million. They live mainly in the northern part of the country around Mazar Sharif, Khanabad and Kunduz.¹⁵ Another Turkic group within the country is the Turkoman (400,000) living on the southern bank of the Oxus River. They are predominantly nomadic or semi-nomadic and in the past moved freely across the Persian and Russian borders.¹⁶ Other important ethnic groups include Hazaras (850,000) located in Hazarajat (600,000), Qizilbash (200,000), Brahvi (200,000) and Baluch (100,000).¹⁷

The above mentioned tribal groups residing in Afghanistan share strong ethnic, cultural, religious and historical ties with people living across the borders. In the east, they are with the 6.5 million Pakistani Pushtuns and a million Pakistani Baluch; in the west, with the Baluchis of Iran; and, in the north, with the Tajiks (2.9

million), Uzbeks (1.2 million) and Turkmen (2 million) of the Soviet Union.¹⁸

At least twenty languages are spoken in Afghanistan, with the two dominant ones being Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pushtun. Despite Pushtun political dominance, Dari, the language of Afghan Tajiks, is the lingua franca of Afghanistan.

Ninety-nine percent of the Afghans profess Islamic faith, out of whom 80 percent are Sunnis and the remainder Shias. The Shia form of Islam is practiced by the Hazaras, some Tajiks and several groups scattered throughout the country including the Qizilbash, Aimak and the Ismaelis inhabiting the Wakhan.

Ethnic bonds and religion play a dominant role in the social life of the people. One belongs to a tribe by birth, and his first and foremost loyalty is to the 'Sardar' (tribal chief). Tribes are states within a state where major decisions are taken and implemented by a 'Jirga' or tribal council. This feudal tribal structure is based primarily on 'Shariah Law' (Islamic law), 'Pushtunwali' (Pathan tribal code) and the 'Rawaj' (customary law).¹⁹ This system obviously has imposed serious constraints on the extent of central ruling authority. Pushtun character has been summed up as one of a 'warlike nature with a fanatical disposition and a passionate love of freedom'.²⁰ Consequently, Afghan monarchs, in order to broaden their political base and to

pursue a policy of centralization committed to defending and supporting the feudal tribal social structure. Louis Dupree, perhaps the world's foremost expert on Afghan culture and society, characterizes the Afghan way of life as complex and full of cultural contradictions.

Their suspicion of outsiders is modified by a traditional code of hospitality, they believe but seldom worship. They are ruggedly irreligious unless an outsider challenges their beliefs. Their brutality is tempered with the love of beauty; dynamic when work is to be done. They are easily swayed to indolence. Their avarice is combined with impetuous generosity. They have an anarchistic love of individual freedom softened by the accepted rule of their aristocratic Khans. Their masculine superiority complex tacitly recognizes women's rights. Their love of isolation is overlaid by curiosity about the outside world.²¹

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

On an economic basis, Afghanistan, with its annual per capita income of about \$130, is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranked in the lowest category of less developed countries. Life expectancy is only 40 years and the literacy rate is a modest 10 percent. Agriculture provides a living for at least 75 percent of the population, yet these farmers and herdsmen must eke out an existence from the six percent of the arid, mountainous countryside that is cultivable and the 40 percent that was meadowland.²²

Afghanistan's industry comprises a limited number of cement, textile, sugar and fertilizer plants. The

country is rich in mineral deposits especially natural gas, copper and iron ore. However, much of it has yet to be exploited due to formidable transportation costs.

Natural gas currently is Afghanistan's single most important economic resource. Discovered by the Soviets at Shibarghan, near the Soviet border, in 1963 the fields boasted reserves (as of 1977) at more than 500 billion cubic meters.²³ A twelve-mile long Soviet built pipeline pumps all but a small amount of the output to the USSR. Aside from two small thermal power plants (250 million cubic meters per year) and the use of gas for cooking and heating in the camps of Soviet technicians in Shibarghan area, Soviet planners did not allow for any use of Afghan natural gas inside Afghanistan itself.²⁴ In 1979 another gas bearing zone capable of producing one quarter million cubic meters per day was discovered by Soviet geologists at Jarquduq. By 1980, gas production was increased by 65 percent.

Agreements with the Soviets called for the export of 2.5 million cubic meters annually to USSR on mutually determined prices. A former Afghan Minister of Mines and Industry (1975-1978), Abdul Tawab Assifi disclosed that despite the agreement "the Soviet Union determined the price it would pay and controlled all information regarding the amount of gas imported, the payment due Afghanistan and other such details."²⁵ As late as 1977, the Soviets were paying the Afghans no more than 20

percent of the going world market price and a third of what they were paying for Iranian gas.²⁶ At the same time, Moscow was selling Soviet gas to Europe at more than twice the rate that it was giving Afghanistan (\$5.10 per thousand cubic feet vis a vis \$2.35 tcf). Reports since 1979 indicate that from 70 billion cubic feet to as much as 105 billion cubic feet have been going annually to USSR to pay for the military occupation.²⁷

Coal deposits in Afghanistan are vast and often of high grade. There are about 100 million tons in high grade, proven reserves, with another 400 million tons in the "probable" category. Coal is found in northern Afghanistan from Herat to Badakshan and has only been recently exploited. By 1979 annual production was up to 190,000 tons.²⁸

Afghanistan boasts of impressive iron ore deposits. Located at remote Hajigak in the mountainous center of Afghanistan, the range is the third largest iron ore depository in the world. Measured reserves are about 111 million tons and speculative reserves more than two billion tons.²⁹

The country is rich in precious stones. Gem quality emerald, ruby, lapis lazuli and garnet represent future hard currency revenue source if mined and marketed properly. Copper deposits exist at Ainak, a mountainous area south of Kabul, amounting to 480 million tons of ore. The entire output goes to the Soviet Union.³⁰ In

addition the country is exploiting its huge deposits of limestone for the cement industry.

Though extremely poor in agriculture and industry, Afghanistan is well endowed with a rich mineral resource base. Despite heavy transportation costs and difficulty in access, the Soviet Union has made tremendous headway in the exploitation of these resources. Indeed most of the cost of the occupation years may have been borne by the Afghans themselves. In 1986, in an interview in New Delhi, Yuri Gankovksky, a senior member of the official delegation accompanying Mikhail Gorbachev on his visit to India, declared that "War in Afghanistan is not costing Moscow one cent. We are paid for everything we are sending to Afghanistan. All our expenses -- I state all twice - are paid by Afghanistan -- through the giant gas field in the northern portion of Afghanistan."³¹

Afghanistan, thus, with its rugged and desolate terrain and inhabited by fiercely independent people belonging to different ethnic groups, is a country not worth the risk. Yet throughout history its strategic location has prompted its use by invaders vying for the control of Indo Subcontinent and an outlet to the warm waters. Its recently discovered natural resources, especially gas, have led it to be exploited namely by the USSR.

Thus, while its geostrategic location and rich mineral deposits are incentives for any invader, the

ruggedness of the terrain and the fiercely independent character of the Afghans remains a major stumbling block.

Regard for personal, religious and cultural freedom combined with the severity of the terrain has in essence been responsible for the effective denial of prolonged occupation of the country by any invader in the past.

ENDNOTES

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³ Klass, p. 6.

⁴ Vartan Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan, 1969, p. 10.

⁵ Klass, p. 1.

⁶ Gregorian, p. 12.

⁷ CGSC ST 20-16, Operational Warfighting Selected Studies, p. 165.

⁸ Joseph J. Collins, A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1986, p. 2.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

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¹¹ Gregorian, pp. 30-31.

¹² Third World Quarterly, October 1989, p. 75.

¹³ Collins, p. 2.

¹⁴ Gregorian, p. 33.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Henry S. Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, 1985, pp. 11-12. Pakistan became a member of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and of Central Treaty Organization in 1955.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹ Gregorian, p. 41.

²⁰ Louis Dupree, Afghanistan, 1973, p. 235.

²¹ Ibid. With United States placing its support behind Pakistan in the region, Afghanistan was alienated. The Soviets quickly exploited the opportunity and expeditiously offered to back Kabul on the issue. The Pashtunistan conflict would become central to Moscow's policy in the region and periodically the Soviets would resurrect the issue whenever it appeared Kabul was drifting toward the west.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 259.

²⁴ A. T. Assifi, "The Russian Rope: Soviet Economic Motives and the Subversion of Afghanistan," World Affairs, Vol. 145, Winter 1982, pp. 253-266.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 256-257. The Soviets demanded that Iran keep secret its higher price, but the Iranians leaked it to the Afghans. When the Afghans pressed for a higher price in 1977-78 the Soviet claimed that the higher Iranian price was due to a higher gas caloric content. This claim was true but the caloric different was only 15 to 20 percent not 200 percent.

²⁷ Klass, p. 113.

²⁸ John F. Shroder, Jr., USSR and Afghanistan Mineral Resources, 1983, pp. 120-122.

²⁹ Klass, p. 119. As a comparison, the total production of ore from Minnesota's Mesabi Range - the foundation of the American steel industry - during the seventy-three years from its development til mid-1960s amounted to 2.4 billion tons.

³⁰ Shroder, p. 138; Assifi, pp. 262-263.

³¹ Klass, p. 11.

CHAPTER V

SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was a logical extension of its Afghan policy which took root in the early nineteenth century. Russian foreign policy, based on both offensive and defensive interests in Afghanistan, was engaged in a grim struggle for regional supremacy, initially against the British Empire and subsequently the United States. Essentially, the geographic location of Afghanistan and the competing interests of the external powers made it the object of a fierce geostrategic game involving blatant, unsolicited interference in the country's internal affairs.

THE GREAT GAME (1838-1919)

Modern superpower involvement in Afghanistan commenced in the early nineteenth century, which was marked by steady Russian expansion southward into the broad steppes of Central Asia and the opposing northward extension of the British Indian Empire. Thus, both empires expanded in the direction of Afghanistan, and they inevitably clashed over which one was to dominate, or annex, this otherwise insignificant state. The British came to use the term the "Great Game" to describe their regional competition with the Russians.¹

Russo-Afghan relations during this period reflected the conflicting interests of Afghanistan, Czarist Russia, and Great Britain.

Afghanistan's interests revolved around maintenance of independence, territorial integrity, and the security of the throne. Though simple and totally defensive in nature, Afghanistan was still perilously placed with regard to successful attainment of these interests. Explaining the essential problem of Afghanistan's foreign relations, King Abdur Rahman Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901, said:

How can a small power like Afghanistan, which is like a goat between these lions [Britain and Czarist Russia], or a grain of wheat between two strong millstones of the grinding mill, stand in the midway of the stones without being ground to dust?

Russia's initial aim in the region was to expand Czarist territory, perhaps with a long-range goal of securing a warm water port. With the passage of time, Russian interests additionally included balancing British influence and, even more important, establishing and securing their own frontiers. This latter interest entailed expansion for which a rationale was presented by Prince A.M. Gorchakov, the Russian Imperial Chancellor in 1864:

The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized states which come into contact with half savage, wandering tribes possessing no fixed social organization. It invariably happens in such cases that the interests of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations, compel the more civilized state to exercise certain ascendancy over neighbors whose turbulence and nomad instincts render them difficult

to live with.... The greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop.³

This policy, based on the Russian concern for their security, involved the imposition, as a basic objective, of some measure of sovereignty over the states along their periphery. Hence, Russia's expansion has mostly been at the cost of its neighbors toward the south and the east. Having subjugated Transcaucasus in 1864, the Russians conquered Tashkent in 1865, Samarkand in 1868, Khiva in 1873, Bokhara in 1876, Ashkhabad and Merv in 1884 and, finally, Panjdeh in 1885.⁴ These operations placed Russian forces and allies along the present day northern boundary of Afghanistan. Especially disconcerting from the British perspective was the fact that as each region was conquered, the Russians brought in logistical support, built roads and railroads, and organized themselves in such a way as to facilitate their going on to conquer the next adjoining territory.⁵

British interests in the region stemmed from her position in India. As Britain sought to check Russian expansion and protect its interests in India from both direct Russian moves and from threat of revolution, she was determined to deny the Russians physical subjugation or even influence peddling in Afghanistan. Twice in the nineteenth century, Britain and Afghanistan went to war, ostensibly over the relationship between Russian and Afghanistan. Britain wanted a stable, non-aligned or

pro-British regime in Kabul. Twice Afghanistan was invaded to obtain this end and on both occasions the expeditions, though partially successful, were highly expensive in terms of losses. In the First Afghan War (1838-1842), more than 15,000 British and Indian soldiers were killed. Though Afghan casualties amounted to a staggering 70,000, a bloody lesson had been taught to the Imperial British Army by the hardy Afghans relying mainly on obsolete weapons and taking full advantage of their rugged and mountainous home terrain.⁶

The British fought the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1879) for fear of increased Russian influence over Afghanistan. The British invaded Kabul, installed a new Amir (king) and concluded the Treaty of Gandamak with the Afghans. This treaty gave the British complete control over Afghan foreign policy. In retrospect, Britain overreacted by engaging itself in two costly wars with Afghanistan, though at no stage did the Russians pose a significant threat to India. The Russians, nevertheless, took advantage of British fears to exert pressure on Britain in India and thereby influence affairs in Europe. However, no matter how exaggerated the British fears were about Russian expansion towards India, the Great Game did succeed in preserving Afghanistan as a buffer state and thus checking the Russian southward expansion. In 1885, Afghan and Russian armies fought over the control of Panjdeh, an oasis 100 miles south of Merv. Fearing

that the ultimate Russian objective was Herat, Britain mobilized. Although war was averted through timely Danish arbitration, the incident was instrumental in drawing up Afghanistan's northern boundary with Russia as well as the eastern frontier with British India. Forced upon King Abdur Rahman in 1893, the Durand Line separated British India's Northwest Frontier Province from Afghanistan and in the process divided the Pathan nation which lived on either side of the line. The ground work for future disputes after the British had retired from the subcontinent in 1947 was thus laid.⁷

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed the end of the Great Game. Both Russia and Britain were increasingly preoccupied with a reinvigorated and militaristic post-Bismark Germany. Additionally, Russia was chastened by its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. In 1907, without the concurrence of Afghanistan, Britain and Russia entered into the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 in which Russia acquiesced in British control over Afghan foreign affairs. Britain promised not to occupy or annex any Afghan territory or to interfere in the country's internal affairs.⁸

POST-WORLD WAR I PERIOD (1919-1947)

Immediately at the conclusion of the First World War, Amanullah, the Amir of Afghanistan, opened a dialogue

with the Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia. Lenin, grabbing the opportunity, not only recognized the Amir's accession to the throne but also recognized the independence of Afghanistan. At the same time, Afghanistan attempted to force a similar recognition from Great Britain and declared war by attacking India in May 1919. Although the Afghans were defeated, Britain granted independence to Afghanistan. With unrest in Ireland and India, and war weariness at home, a protracted war with Afghanistan or a costly occupation had to be avoided. Additionally, the British feared that denial of independence would drive Amanullah into Soviet hands.⁹ The Soviets went to great lengths to cultivate Amanullah and at one point Lenin even called Amanullah the leader of "the only independent Muslim state in the world." and declared that Afghanistan was preordained for "the greatest historic task of uniting around itself all the enslaved Muslim peoples and leading them on the road to freedom and independence."¹⁰ Lenin also offered to give Afghanistan military aid against England.¹¹

However, from 1921 to 1924, Soviet-Afghan relations suffered as the result of Soviet mistreatment of Central Asian Muslims during the Basmachi Revolt. The Basmachis were the Muslim partisans who fought Russian control. The problem was complicated by the Soviet promise to Afghanistan in their 1921 treaty to respect the independence and freedom of Khiva and Bokhara, and by

Amanullah's Pan-Islamic attitudes which would, he planned produce a single Central Asian confederation with Kabul as its capital. Despite some help from Amanullah, the Basmachi were ultimately defeated by a combination of military pressure, economic measures and political steps.¹¹ At the height of the movement, Soviet sources estimated their numbers between 18,000-20,000, but old clan, tribal and ethnic divisions prevented a concerted drive against the Soviets.

Afghanistan's foreign policy from 1924-1929 was designed to prevent either Britain or the USSR from gaining a position of dominance in Afghanistan. The 1921 treaty with the Soviets was balanced by a treaty of "neighbourly relations" between Afghanistan and Britain. In 1924, the Soviets came to Amanullah's rescue when the latter was faced by a rebellion of Afghans opposed to his internal reforms. Soviet war planes were used to bombard the rebels into submission.

The period between 1925 and 1930 was marked by three brief Soviet invasions. While these interventions were not significantly successful they served to increase Soviet influence in Afghanistan. The first invasion was aimed at the occupation of a disputed border island in 1925. Afghan annoyance and British concerns forced the Soviets to return the island in 1926. The second invasion in 1929 was launched to restore the deposed Amanullah to the throne. The Soviet Army detachment, numbering between

1,000 to 1,500 men, joined up with Amanullah's forces in Afghanistan and marched towards Kabul.¹² After defeating rival forces in Mazare-Sharif and Khulm, the campaign had to be abandoned as Amanullah had abdicated and fled with his family to India. The whole raison d'etre for the campaign disappeared and the Soviets promptly withdrew their troops. The final limited invasion was actually a hot pursuit operation launched forty miles deep into Afghanistan in a vain attempt to capture a Basmachi leader in 1930.

Bacha Saqao, an illiterate adventurer who had ousted Amanullah, ruled Afghanistan for nine months until October 1929 when he was driven out by Nadir Khan, a former Afghan Ambassador to France. Nadir Khan, in turn, ruled till 1933, reversed all of Amanullah's unpopular reforms and largely eliminated Russian influence in Afghanistan.¹³ Nadir Khan was assassinated in 1933 and was succeeded by his son, Muhammad Zahir Shah, who reigned but did not rule for forty years. Afghanistan, during the Second World War, remained neutral.

In summary, the Soviet policy toward Afghanistan from 1918 to 1945 was characterized by cordial, pragmatic, state-to-state relations, oriented towards keeping the southern border free of turbulence and instability. Cultivation of the Afghans regardless of their ideological or political leaning, and denial of Afghanistan to the British for use as a base of operations against the USSR

formed the cornerstone of the policy. Considering the problems confronting the Soviets at home and on an international level, the USSR thought it prudent to downplay its activities in Southwest Asia. British power, too, was on the decline. Like the Soviet Union, Britain was still recovering from the effects of the First World War. Afghanistan maintained a neutral posture during this period by maintaining cordial relations with both the powers.

THE POST-WAR YEARS (1947-1973)

The year 1947 was marked by the British exit from India and the creation of the state of Pakistan on the eastern flank of Afghanistan. The culmination of the Second World War also witnessed the emergence of the United States and the USSR as the two most powerful nations in the world. Until 1953, the Afghan arena was relatively quiet due to the preoccupation of both superpowers with post-war recovery, the Cold War in Europe and the Korean War. Soviet policy up to 1953 was also hampered by the "two camp" theory in which the Soviet leadership saw the newly independent states of Asia and the Middle East "as mere puppets of the western colonial powers and thus incapable of formulating and implementing an independent policy - either domestic or foreign."¹⁴ Though Afghanistan hardly qualified for the "newly independent" category, it was certainly feudal, backward

and Western leaning. Despite the Stalin doctrine, Afghanistan was granted duty free transit rights for its imports in 1950 after Pakistan had cancelled transit rights through its territory during the first post-war Pashtonistan flare up.

The death of Stalin in 1953 and installation of Sardar Muhammad Daoud as the prime minister of Afghanistan totally changed regional politics. While the USSR, having discarded the "two camp theory," had commenced the policy of active courtship of the Asian and Middle Eastern countries, the young and energetic Daoud aimed for rapid economic development and a quick solution to the Pashtunistan issue. Though the Soviets had extended \$6 million in developmental aid in 1954, Afghanistan preserved its historic non-alignment policy. Daoud approached the USA, considering it a logical successor to Great Britain in the region, for military assistance later in the year. However, at this crucial juncture, the United States proved unable or unwilling to fill the political void left by Britain. Kabul's request for military aid was refused on the grounds that the stipulated condition of joining CENTO (Central Treaty Organization or Baghdad Pact) had not been met. Louis Dupree maintains that:

The Daoud government officially stated the Americans refused to give Afghanistan military aid because the Afghans would not sign the required mutual security agreements or join the Baghdad Pact. According to United States diplomats on the scene at the time, some of the Afghan military wanted to join

the pact but demanded assurances that they would be defended by the United States if their acceptance of arms aid precipitated a Russian invasion or major subversive efforts inside Afghanistan.¹⁵

Further, Washington declined to give an American commitment to the defence of Afghanistan since the United States had neither the regional presence nor the capability to be the guarantor of Afghanistan's borders.

As indicated in the Embassy reports from Kabul, right up to the end of the 1970s, the United States saw Afghanistan to be irrelevant to its interests:

For the United States, Afghanistan has at the present limited direct interest: it is not an important trading partner; it is not an access route for U.S. trade with others; it is not presently as far as is known a source of oil or scarce strategic metals; there are no treaty ties or defence commitments; and Afghanistan does not provide us with significant defense, intelligence or scientific facilities. United States policy has long recognized these facts.¹⁶

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., former ambassador to Afghanistan adds that U.S. policy during the period was influenced by two other factors:

(1) The United States had close ties with Pakistan, which was a much more important country and

(2) Washington was afraid that sending military equipment to Afghanistan would so alarm the Soviets that they would make some kind of move against Afghanistan.¹⁷

The United States thus wanted an Afghanistan that was "neutral, independent and not overcommitted to the Soviet bloc."¹⁸ Although economic aid was seen as a potent weapon, U.S. policy demanded exercise of caution when dealing with Afghanistan. Excessive U.S. involvement

could potentially trigger a major reaction from the USSR and could even endanger the territorial integrity of Afghanistan.¹⁹

Accordingly, U.S. objectives in Afghanistan were: (1) the preservation of Afghan territorial integrity and independence; (2) the creation of a viable political and economic system; (3) the prevention of excessive Soviet influence; and (4) the improvement of Afghanistan's ties with Pakistan and Iran.²⁰

A month after the U.S. refused assistance in January 1955, Daoud turned to the Soviets for military aid. The Soviets obliged in a big way and have never since looked back. During the December 1955 visit of Khrushchev and Prime Minister Bulganin to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union not only pledged \$100 million long-term loan but also agreed to provide military assistance. The Soviet leaders expressed open support for Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue:

We think that the demands of Afghanistan to give the population of bordering 'Pashtunistan' an opportunity of freely expressing their will are justified.²¹

The Soviet objectives in Afghanistan up to 1978 included: (1) providing incentives for Afghanistan not to join a northern tier alliance; (2) developing such trade and aid links as to encourage dependence on the Soviet Union; (3) conducting mutually beneficial trade relations; (4) using Afghanistan to support the programs of Soviet

foreign policy; and (5) using Afghanistan as a model of relations between states with different social systems.²² During the first Daud regime (1953-1963), Afghanistan and the Soviet Union grew extremely close in trade and in military assistance. \$400 million in developmental assistance was mainly spent on construction of roads and airports while other projects included setting up of grain silos, hospitals, flour mills, cement plants and the construction of a gas pipeline which would supply natural gas directly to the Soviet Union from the Afghan fields located close to the Russo-Afghan border. Significantly, the development of strategically expedient projects (roads and airfields) took a clear priority. Airfields at Bagram, near Kabul; Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan; and at Shindand in the central part of western Afghanistan, were built during this period and extensively used by Soviet invading forces in the 1979 invasion. The strategic Salang Tunnel, on the 67-mile highway north of Kabul through the Hindukush, was instrumental in the later movement of Soviet ground forces from the northern to the southern part of the country.²³

Daoud's personal commitment to the Pushtunistan issue was a powerful incentive for turning to Soviet bloc armaments. Manipulating the trouble with Pakistan, Daoud won approval from the Loya Jirgah (Parliament) in November 1955 for a military aid relationship with the Communists whom tribal elders regarded with religious hatred and

secular apprehension.²⁴ Military assistance was mainly in the form of concessional arms transfers, advisory support and training of officers in the USSR.

Czechoslovak military aid for \$3 million in October 1955 was followed by a Soviet loan of \$32.4 million in July 1956.²⁵ By formal agreement, one quarter of all Afghan officers received training within the USSR. The course of instruction included tactics, organizational theory, and "social development."²⁶ Allegedly, extensive efforts were made to infiltrate the Afghan officer corps, an institution which historically has held the key to power in the nation. American diplomats noted in 1971 that:

There is no effective organization within the military to counter or even catalog the long-term, possible subversive effects of Soviet training of the many military [Afghan] officers who go to the USSR for stints as long as six years.²⁷

When questioned about Soviet subversion in 1956, Daoud immediately retorted that he was well aware of the 1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia and further added that Afghans would rather starve than accept help that restricted their freedom or threatened their territorial integrity.²⁸

In December 1959, President Eisenhower made a brief but highly successful trip to Afghanistan. Khrushchev countered by arranging a similar visit in early 1960. During this visit a Soviet offer to finance the entire second five year development plan (1960-1965) was respectfully declined by a cautiously skeptical Daoud.²⁹

The 1960 flareup of the Pashtunistan issue led to an official break in diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The closure of the Pakistani border deprived Kabul of essential customs revenue, and closed a primary trade route to the Indian subcontinent and the west. Amid a growing public outcry, Daoud was asked by the Afghan king to step down. Thus, Daoud's increasingly autocratic style of leadership, initiation of some unpopular reforms and his resolute stand on the Pashtunistan issue led to his dismissal in March 1963.

The next ten years witnessed political instability as no less than five prime ministers held office during this period. King Zahir Shah, in his experiment with democracy, tried to turn a traditional Asian royal dictatorship into a modern constitutional monarchy. The experiment failed due to the lack of preparedness of his primitive country for self-rule, his own hesitancy about permitting the development of popular institutions and administrative incompetence.³¹ The change in administrations had no effect on Soviet-Afghan relations and economic and military assistance continued at a steady pace. By 1973 total Soviet military and economic aid amounted to \$1.5 billion, outweighing U.S. economic assistance (\$425 million) by a factor of three to one.³¹

During this unsettling period, the pro-Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was founded on January 1, 1965. Its objective was to build a

Socialist society in Afghanistan based on "adapting Marxist-Leninist revolutionary principles to conditions in Afghanistan."³² In 1967 the PDPA split into two factions - Taraki's KHALQ (Masses) and Karmal's PARCHAM (Banner). While both were pro-Moscow, the Khalq took a more revolutionary, anti-regime line. The Parcham faction expressed willingness to work with the current regime. The Khalq gained its strength from the military and rural areas while the Parcham was definitely stronger among students and Kabul intellectuals.

A successful July 1973 coup executed by Daoud and supported by the military and PDPA led to the king's exile and the founding of the Republic of Afghanistan which was to conform to the true spirit of Islam.³³ Daoud quickly consolidated power, reasserted his authority and, after parting ways with the Leftists, set up his own party in 1975.

Soviet aid was significant during the second Daoud regime (1973-1978). In 1974, the Soviets granted \$150 million in credits as economic assistance while military aid doubled from \$66 million in 1971 and 1972 to \$137 million in 1973 and 1974. By 1978, the 100,000-man Afghan Army, equipped with some T-62 tanks and MiG-21 aircraft, had become a relatively modern fighting force. Also, by 1978 at least 4,000 Afghan officers had been trained in the Soviet Union, some for as long as four years.³⁴

During this period both Soviet and Afghan foreign policy were strongly conditioned by a changing international environment. The Soviet Union and the United States were entering a period of detente and this, in some cases, exerted a moderating influence on the Soviet behavior. The Soviet Union, however, was having a difficult time with China and their relations had hit rock bottom. Both China and the Soviet Union seemed interested in ringing the other nation with allies. The Soviets had more success as Vietnam, India and Afghanistan were all beneficiaries of Soviet friendship. Even Pakistan, a strong Chinese ally, and Iran, one of the strongest U.S. allies in the region, had greatly improved relations with the USSR.³⁵ Finally, the oil rich Muslim states of the Middle East had appeared on the world scene as potential aid donors. Thus, while the Pastunistan issue erupted in the early years of the second Daoud regime, it never equalled its earlier intensity. This was due partially to a Soviet restraining attitude as well as Daoud's realization that the issue was not popular with other Islamic states. In addition, Daoud conceded in 1975 that Pakistan was far too strong for even a modern Afghan army.³⁶

Beginning in 1974, Daoud began to decrease his reliance on his Soviet benefactors for aid and military assistance. Pursuing an independent, non-aligned policy, he initiated military training arrangements with India and

Egypt, greatly improved relations with Pakistan and received aid and pledges from China, Iran, Saudia Arabia and Kuwait. China provided \$55 million in 1974 while Iran pledged \$2 billion, of which \$10 million were actually given.³⁷ Daoud's pursuit of a truly non-aligned policy severely irritated the Soviets. In 1982, a Soviet scholar bluntly noted that the Shah's 1975 offer of aid had the "purpose of weakening Soviet-Aghan relations."³⁸

Anthony Arnold states that during Daoud's visit to Moscow in 1977, Secretary General Brezhnev ordered the Afghan leader to "get rid of all those Imperialist advisers in his country." Daoud coldly retorted that when Afghanistan no longer required the presence of foreign advisers, they all would leave.³⁹ (Emphasis added.)

These events ultimately led to the Soviet involvement in the reunification of the PDPA in March 1977. Uncomfortable with Daoud's improving relationship with Pakistan and Iran, haughty personal manner, and his intolerance of Afghan Leftists, the Soviets were convinced that an alternative had to be created, and the USSR began in late 1976 to prepare for post-Daoud eventualities.⁴⁰

Bradsher, Collins and others agree unanimously on the point that the PDPA reunification was a result of active Soviet complicity. Again, the Soviets knew beyond a doubt that the PDPA wanted to launch a coup but expected it to take place a few years in the future.⁴¹

Intensive recruiting in careful secrecy was conducted by both the factions during 1977. The Khalq was especially successful in its drive to recruit armed forces personnel, and according to a later estimate, had four times as many military adherents as Parcham.⁴² However, by the time of the coup Khalq could claim no more than 2,500 members while Parcham claimed the loyalty of 1,000-1,500 members.⁴³ The crucial role in any future PDPA action would be played by the Soviet trained armed forces and who had to a considerable extent been penetrated by the Khalqis. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul estimated the combined strength of PDPA to be 3,000.⁴⁴

The ultimate cause for a coup was provided by Daoud himself. Over the years he had become increasingly unpopular because of his autocratic style and politically repressive, economically drifting regime. As Louis Dupree has noted:

By summer 1977, support for the republic had dissipated almost completely. The possibility that Taraki might succeed Daoud, legally or illegally, was widely discussed at Kabul University and throughout the Afghan intellectual community.⁴⁵

THE SAUR REVOLUTION

The fateful chain of events that culminated in the April revolution commenced with the murder of Parcham ideologue Mir Akbar Khyber on 17 April 1978. The PDPA openly accused the government of the killing and, to further exploit a tense situation, mobilized 15,000

demonstrators at Khyber's funeral. Inevitably, the orderly march was soon transformed into violent rioting requiring deployment of army units. Shocked by the size of the demonstration and fearing beginning of a popular revolt, Daud moved quickly to arrest the top PDPA leaders. Wilkins contends that at this point Daoud committed the fatal error of neither attempting to reach an accord with the rebels nor decisively defeating them.⁴⁶ Even preventive measures were grossly inadequate. Only the top leadership of PDPA was taken into custody, Taraki among them. Surprisingly, Hafizullah Amin, the Khalqi liaison with the pro-Soviet elements in the military, was placed under loose house arrest. The military cadres were not investigated and most of the party rank and file remained free.

Believing that a purge of pro-Soviet factions in the army was imminent, Amin decided on the immediate staging of the coup. Throughout the night, Amin's son carried instructions to key party and military figures. When Amin was taken to jail at 10:30 on 26 April the coup was already underway. As a result of 22 years of Soviet preparations, the majority of the army was either incapacitated or fought alongside the rebels. By all indications, only the 7th Division, 15th Armoured Brigade and the Republican Guard remained loyal to the regime and fought into the early morning hours of the 28th.⁴⁷

The coup began at 6:00 a.m. on 27 April and terminated in the evening the same day. By best estimates around 1,000 people died, including Daoud, most of his family and close to half of the 2,000-man Republican Guard.⁴⁸ On 30 April Taraki was named head of the revolutionary council and prime minister. On the same day, the Soviet Union recognized the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (PDRA).

The Saur revolution was an urban coup d'etat against an unpopular, autocratic government. With regard to Soviet complicity, J. J. Collins, the author of The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan - A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy, firmly believes that although there is no substantive proof that the Soviets planned, directed or participated in the coup, they immediately sensed the opening and exploited the opportunity thoroughly to their advantage.⁴⁹ While Babrak Karmal, the Parcham Chief, was appointed deputy prime minister, Hafizullah Amin, the Khalq strongman was given the portfolios of deputy prime minister and foreign minister. By virtue of his strong ties with the military, Amin held perhaps the most personal power in the new regime. The initial cabinet was divided with eleven seats for Khalq and ten for Parcham. However, the Khalqis held a clear advantage. In addition to support within the Army, departmental functionaries also belonged to this faction.

Though Radio Kabul described the new regime as "democratic, Islamic, reformist, and non-aligned,"⁴⁹ Amin went to great lengths to identify the April revolution with 1917 Russian revolution.⁵⁰ He even remarked that "the Afghan revolution was a continuation of the USSR's Great October Revolution."⁵¹

Closer ties with the Soviet Union were immediately in evidence by the unusually large number of economic and aid agreements that were signed in 1978. Besides twenty-five agreements with COMECON countries, the new regime received an additional \$22 million from the Soviet Union to exploit natural gas.⁵² In the military sphere, by the end of 1978, the Soviets had more than doubled their pre-Saur 350 man advisory contingent. In December 1978, Afghanistan's indisputable shift towards the Soviet Union was made manifest by the signing of a 20 year Treaty of Friendship, Good, Neighborliness, and Cooperation.⁵³ Ironically, Article 4 of the treaty dealing with security commitment would be used in December 1979 to justify the Soviet invasion.

In July 1978, Taraki and Amin purged the Parcham faction from the leadership and 800 Parcham supporters from the military. Karmal was posted as ambassador to Czechoslovakia from where he fled and sought refuge in USSR. Though the Soviets had shown a clear but discrete preference for Parcham, the faction that was least radical and more receptive to Soviet interests, they pragmatically

continued to work with the radical Khalqis. The party infighting and purges further reduced PDPA's strength to less than 1,200.⁵⁴

In a country with an estimated 85 percent rural population, the Khalq showed little appreciation for, or sensitivity to the traditions and values of the great majority of Afghans. Under Amin's pressure, the idealistic Taraki initiated vast land reform measures and radical policies directly challenging Islamic doctrine. These unpopular measures were followed by unveiling of a new national flag, replacing Islamic green with a blood-red derivative of the Soviet banner.⁵⁵ (The old flag was reinstated under massive public pressure in 1980 by Babrak Karmal).

Violent opposition to Taraki's reforms surfaced in the early fall of 1978 with spontaneous and largely uncoordinated revolts nationwide. Khalq's anti-Islamic actions had started taking a toll. In the face of growing popular unrest, the government resorted to severe repressive measures. From April 1978 to December 1979, estimates of slain political prisoners rose to 20,000.⁵⁶ Dupree adds that the Amin regime openly admitted to 12,000 killed during this period and even published their names.⁵⁷ The victims included ex-Daoud elements, Parchamis and Islamic Traditionalists. Allegedly, Moscow abhorred these measures and in fact

attempted to intervene politically in order to moderate the increasingly radical stance of the Khalq.

Ostensibly preempting "nationalist elements" within the army, the officer corps was decimated by government arrests. Discord and unrest spread rapidly through the ranks, encouraging mutiny and desertion to insurgent forces operating in the countryside. As a direct consequence, Soviet military presence became all the more necessary and in the beginning of 1979 selected Soviet advisors assumed direct combat and leadership roles in the DRA army, causing even greater discord within the ranks.⁵⁸

Following Ambassador Dubbs' kidnapping and killing in February 1979, the USA announced that it was cutting the remainder of its \$20 million 1979 aid commitment. The U.S. presence after this incident was only a token.

In March 1979, the insurgency against the PDPA took a significant turn, with the capture of the city of Herat by the rebels and the wholesale massacre of the local Soviet advisory group. The Afghan government's brutal retaliation further increased the level of local support for the insurgents and by the end of the month the rebellion had spread through two thirds of the country's 28 provinces. During March and April, Moscow also accelerated armament deliveries, and expanded the program to include state of the art offensive weapons systems such as T62 tanks and Mi-24 helicopter gunships.

In response to the Herat massacre, a high level Soviet delegation led by General A. A. Yepishev was deispatched to Kabul in April, apparently with the purpose of making a complete analysis of the current military situation. However, besides recommending an increase in military aid and advisers, the delegation gave no indications that its findings were particularly distressing.⁵⁹ During the same period a Soviet ranking diplomat, Vasiliy Safronchuk, allegedly tried to convince Kabul regime to suspend temporarily its radical policies in order to regain a measure of stability in the country. Subsequent DRA actions indicate that the advice was totally ignored.

By September, desertion had brought the Afghan force level down to less than 30 percent.⁶⁰ Units still loyal to the regime refused to venture into the countryside then dominated by the insurgents. Loss of the countryside also deprived Kabul of its major source of army recruitment. The Soviets responded by increasing the number of its military advisors to 4,000 in October. Bagram Air Base was taken over from the Afghan Air Force. By the fall of 1979, military advisers were posted down to company level and Soviet pilots began flying combat missions, particularly with helicopter gunships.⁶¹

From mid-August to mid-October, Ivan Pavlovskiy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet ground forces (and the Soviet Commander in the invasion of Czechoslovakia)

led a high ranking military delegation to assess the situation. Significantly, and in contrast to the case of the previous Soviet delegations, the group received no publicity.

Increasingly distressed and frustrated by the radical and unpopular PDPA policies, the Soviet Union in late summer was desperately exploring different options to correct the ever deteriorating situation. In September, during Taraki's stopover at Moscow, Brezhnev apparently urged him to oust Amin and broaden the base of his regime.⁶² Four days after Taraki's return to Kabul, the party leader was severely wounded in a gun battle with Amin and was arrested. The wary Amin had sensed the conspiracy and with support of local units had succeeded in turning the tables on Taraki and the Soviets.

While Amin consolidated power, Taraki officially "retired for health reasons".⁶³ On October 10 he was allegedly suffocated by Amin's henchmen. Moscow duly recognized Amin's regime but also presumably initiated plans for military intervention.⁶⁴ After the palace shootout incident, Amin grew paranoid about his security and began to severely mistrust the Soviets. Publicly, however, he remained attentive to Moscow's wishes, attempted to appease the Muslim clergy and backed the Soviet position on peace in Europe. The military situation continued to deteriorate and by December more than 400,000 Afghans had taken refuge in Pakistan and

perhaps half that number had fled to Iran.⁶⁵ The Soviets attributed the alarming nature of the situation to a number of factors: (1) disunity in the PDPA, (2) outside interference and external support to the rebels, and (3) the role played by Amin in initiating the radical and unpopular reforms combined with the repressive nature of his regime. A junior Soviet diplomat complained to a U.S. counterpart in September:

The Khalqis had made a mistake in trying to do too many things too fast. The regime should have taken four or five years to effect what they tried to accomplish in a few months.

He was convinced that the Khalqis had failed.⁶⁶ With some exaggeration the Soviets also charged that Amin was "anxious to develop secret contacts with the United States."⁶⁷

In late November, the Soviet press exploited the Iran crisis in a well planned effort to draw international attention away from Afghanistan. Simultaneously, Red Army troops had started replacing Afghan units in the capital, ostensibly to free national forces for operations in the country. Soviet military personnel in country now numbered 5,000, including a 1,000 in Soviet combat units.⁶⁸ Washington's first show of concern followed a report that Soviet troops in Turkmenistan had been put on a condition of "limited readiness" with reserves mobilized in the Central Asian military district.⁶⁸ The Carter Administration issued the first of four private warnings

to Moscow but to no avail. On December 8 an airborne regiment was posted to the Soviet controlled Bagram Air Base. On the 20th this unit moved with its BMD carriers and assault guns to secure the Salang Pass Tunnel, the key chokepoint between Kabul and Termez. On 28 December, it would link up with the 357th Mechanized Rifle Division, the lead element of the invading Soviet 40th Army. The die was cast and Afghanistan's one hundred and forty year long status of a non-aligned buffer state was about to end.

SUMMARY

The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan from 1838 to 1978 followed a predictable policy - maintaining Afghanistan as a buffer between the USSR and the pro-western region of Southwest Asia. A degree of political control was also desired in order to keep Afghanistan in its sphere of influence.

The "Great Game" played between the Czarist Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was, in fact, a fierce diplomatic struggle aimed at the ultimate domination of Afghanistan. The Soviets after 1947 were pitted against the USA in the continuation of the same 'game'.

Throughout this period, the Russians demonstrated a remarkable consistency with regard to objectives in Afghanistan. The Soviet approach was based on pragmatism,

opportunism and use of economic and military aid as a tool. Close ties were developed to the point of the near total dependence of Afghanistan on its Soviet benefactors. Moreover, economic and military assistance was lavishly provided in order to penetrate all segments of Afghan society, politically and ideologically. The Soviets, too, exhibited an ability to work well with any type of regime in Kabul, but would grow wary if the leaders started charting independent policies as in the cases of the second Daud regime and Amin. Initially delighted with the unexpected Communist coup in Afghanistan, the Soviets, correctly reading the Afghan socio-economic environment, continuously warned the PDPA against its repressive policies and unpopular reforms.

Ironically, after working successfully with numerous regimes over a hundred and forty years, in the end it was a Soviet-inspired Afghan Communist government that, having power thrust into its hands unexpectedly and even accidentally, through its idealistic reformism and brutal authoritarianism started the country on a downward spiral into civil war and Soviet occupation which Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 would term as a "bleeding wound."⁶⁸

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER VI

SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

THE INVASION (24-27 DECEMBER 1979)

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was modeled after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Both operations featured elaborate deception, subversion of an unreliable communist government, employment of airborne troops to seize key objectives in the capital, the movement of motorized rifle troops to link up with air landed elements and finally, the replacement of the government with more reliable comrades. Additionally, Generals Yepishev and Pavlovskiy, two key observers sent to Afghanistan, were both veterans of the Czechoslovak invasion.¹

Through their military operation, the Soviets aimed at deposing Amin, installing a new Karmal led Khalq-Parcham coalition, and frightening or deterring the rebels in order to provide Karmal sufficient time to rebuild an army and re-establish control over the countryside. Apparently, Soviet estimates of the global political environment also portrayed the projected invasion as a low risk operation. Muted and short-term U.S. reaction to the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), coupled with the lack of American commitment in countering Russian moves in Ethiopia and Angola, may have confirmed the Soviet belief

that U.S. reaction would be moderate and containable. The distraction of the U.S. by the hostage crisis in Iran was viewed as advantageous. The Soviets also counted upon the impending U.S. military action toward Iran to offset the reaction of the Third World, Muslim states in particular, much as the world's attention to the Suez crisis diverted attention from the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Internal constraints, in the USSR and Afghanistan, were viewed as minimal. Using less than four percent of its total ground forces and with Czechoslovakia as a guide, the operation promised to be not only a low cost venture but also one which would guarantee success within a few months.

Finally, there was not much incentive for the Soviet Union to refrain from what was deemed as a necessary action in order to maintain detente and avoid the derailment of SALT Two. Detente, from the Soviet perspective, had not prevented normalisation of relations between USA and China, while SALT Two had not prevented the decision to deploy the MX missile nor had it stopped NATO from agreeing to deploy in western Europe 572 cruise and Pershing missiles capable of hitting the Soviet homeland. This, in itself, did not provoke the Soviet action in Afghanistan, but it did remove a possible, if always limited, constraint.²

From the events that followed, it is clear that the Soviets, taking into account these considerations, had

seriously miscalculated, both in their estimate of the situation in Afghanistan and in their calculation of the effects of the invasion. Edward Crankshaw points out that often the Soviets are given credit for an omniscience which neither they nor any other people have ever possessed:

One of the serious mistakes of the west has been to overrate often to an absurd degree, the knowledge and understanding of the world enjoyed by the Soviet Union -- the mistake is serious because it has led us again and again to attribute greatly subtlety and exactitude of calculation to manifestations of Soviet government behaviour when often arise from ignorance and muddle.³

THE SOVIET INVASION OPERATION

The actual Soviet invasion began on 24 December with the landing of airborne troops at Bagram and Kabul airports. Between 24 December and 27 December, the Soviets, utilizing 200 flights of AN-12, AN-22, and IL-76 military transport aircrafts, had deployed 6,500 airborne troops to seize strategic objectives in and around the Afghan capital.⁴ Simultaneously, two motorized rifle divisions crossed the northern frontier in three spearheads aimed at Herat, Kabul, and the Pakistani border. In a startlingly bold and quick move, the Soviet had deployed 50,000 troops by the end of the year. Subsequently, three more divisions, initially held in reserve, crossed into Afghanistan bringing the total number of Soviet troops to 85,000 by the end of March.⁵ Significantly, a large number of invading troops were from

Central Asia.⁶ The immediate tasks assigned to Soviet forces were to secure major roads and urban areas, make a show of force, and limit infiltration of guerrillas from sanctuaries in Pakistan and Iran.

Amin was killed in a Spetsnaz assault on the palace and on 28 December 1979, a new government under Babrak Karmal (reportedly flown in that day) was installed. Though composed of both the factions of PDPA, the coalition was fraught with problems. Personal feuds and enmities ran deep and, secondly, a Parcham dominated coalition was even more problematical than a Khalq dominated one. Still smarting over the rough treatment meted out to Amin, the Khalqis vehemently opposed Parcham efforts to modify and moderate the reforms of the previous government. Compounding this problem was the strong hold of the Khalq over the army where they outnumbered the Parcham by a factor of three to one. By the fall of 1980, many from the Khalq faction were actually fighting alongside the resistance.⁷ The army too, as a result of heavy defections, disintegrated from a strength of about 100,000 to 30,000 or less. Also, by spring 1980, more than 700,000 Afghans had fled to Pakistan and Iran.⁸

The Soviets, against all previous expectations, were surprised by the severity of the international reaction. The United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly voted for an "immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan."⁹

Notably, two-thirds of non-aligned nations, Iraq, Iran, Yugoslavia and even Rumania implicitly criticized the Soviet Union. The Chinese saw Afghanistan as part of the Soviet grand design to encircle China, and to cut Europe and Japan off from their energy supplies.¹⁰ The U.S. reaction represented one of the strongest series of actions ever taken by the United States over any specific Soviet act. In addition to the imposition of a number of stiff measures, President Carter withdrew the SALT Two treaty from active consideration for ratification by the Senate and announced the Carter Doctrine:

An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America. And such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.¹¹

In related moves, the United States reaffirmed its 1959 agreement "to help Pakistan preserve its independence and its integrity."¹² A few years later China was granted the most favoured nation status.

The justification for the initial intervention and the subsequent Soviet presence was cast largely in terms of dealing with external forces. Brezhnev, in his first post invasion statement claimed that:

A well developed conspiracy by external reactionary forces had created a real threat that Afghanistan would lose its independence and be transformed into a military staging ground for the imperialists on our country's southern border.¹³

Other Soviet statements also emphasized the external nature of the counter-revolutionary forces. It was

claimed that the Afghan government, under threat from outside, had invited Soviet military forces into the country to defend the revolution, and that the Soviet response was fully in accord with Article 4 of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship and Article 51 of the UN Charter.¹⁴ Even excluding the wilder claims that Amin was a CIA agent, the Soviet interpretation was disingenuous and contrived. The problem of stability in Afghanistan was internal rather than external, and though there is ground to support the Soviet claim that the rebel forces had been receiving limited aid from Pakistan, China, Iran, Saudia Arabia and Egypt, the underlying causes of the invasion lay elsewhere.

CAUSES OF THE INVASION

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has been interpreted in different ways. Richard Pipes led the 'offensive' group which viewed the Soviet action as a means to an end, an expansionist move aimed at the ultimate seizure of the vital Strait of Hormuz. George Kennan on the other hand stressed the 'defensive' aspects of the invasion in which the Soviet action was seen primarily in terms of defense of Soviet borders and with no indications of a Russian intention to invade the Persian Gulf area. Henry Bradsher, in his book Afghanistan and Soviet Union, maintains that the defensive-offensive argument was meaningless.

In the short-term, the move into Afghanistan had a defensive quality; in the long-term, it offered offensive possibilities even if they were not part of the original calculation. It could be viewed as tactically defensive, strategically offensive, without the two having to be posted as alternatives.¹⁵

Protection of Long-Standing Soviet

Investments in Afghanistan

The Soviet Union, since the 1950s, had heavily supported Afghanistan - economically, militarily and politically. With the Marxist Amin government headed towards disintegration, a limited but decisive military intervention in Afghanistan was seen as the best way to retrieve a deteriorating situation and thus ensure continuance of Soviet influence in the country.

Security Concerns

The perceived Sino-American collusion in supporting the rebels in Afghanistan, coupled with the U.S. threat of a possible military intervention in Iran, further compounded traditional Soviet fear of encirclement. Leonid Brezhnev commented at the time that "a hot bed of serious danger to the security of the Soviet state was created on our southern border."¹⁶

Fundamentalist Threat

Growing instability on Soviet borders and the potential spill over effects of Islamic fundamentalism on

the 50 million Muslims living in the USSR was of great concern to the Soviet Union. The Muslim rebellion during the 1979 civil war in Afghanistan and recent stirrings of religious fervour in Pakistan and Turkey were seen as indicators of a broad international dimension to the new Islamic reawakening. The Soviets were probably fearful that if allowed to flourish Muslim fundamentalism in Iran and Afghanistan would directly encourage pan-Islamic tendencies in Central Asia and in Muslim Transcaucasia.¹⁷

In addition to these factors, the economic gains that the Soviet Union could achieve from Afghanistan can be regarded as a supplementary motive for the invasion.

Though denied by the Soviets, geostrategic considerations also undoubtedly played a role in the decision to invade. The subsequent invasion gave the Soviets additional leverage against Pakistan and Iran, and moved Soviet power significantly closer to the oil rich Persian Gulf.¹⁸

THE OCCUPATION YEARS

Of the three objectives stipulated by the Soviets at the time of the invasion, two had been accomplished, namely the unseating of Amin and installation of a new Khalq-Parcham coalition. With regard to the third objective, which aimed at frightening or deterring the rebels by a massive show of military strength, the Soviets were sorely disappointed. A pathetic ignorance of Afghan

culture and history led the Soviets to believe that the Afghans would be intimidated by a foreign invasion. Suffering 600 dead and 2,400 wounded during the first six weeks of occupation quickly convinced the Russians that the operation was not likely to be a short-lived affair and they settled down for a long, protracted conflict.¹⁹

During the occupation years, the Soviets aimed at achieving the following objectives: (1) stabilisation of the internal security situation, (2) strengthening the power base of the Karmal regime (3) exerting pressure on Pakistan and Iran with a view to cutting external support to the Mujahideen (holy warriors) and, (4) regaining a reasonable amount of international support through diplomatic and propaganda offensives.

On the military front, the Soviets quickly realized that they were not an army of occupation but were engaged in a fierce counterinsurgency operation. Severe terrain restrictions, a limited communications infrastructure and an insufficient number of troops to hold the ground forced the Soviets to adopt a modified enclave strategy. This strategy was directed at holding the major centers of communications, limiting infiltration and destroying local resistance strongholds at minimum cost to their own forces. In essence, high technology, superior tactical mobility and fire power were used to compensate for inadequacy in troop strength. Though over 100 offensive operations were conducted in 1980 alone, the Soviets did

not make a concerted effort to root out the guerrillas but opted instead for a strategy of containment aimed at wearing out the resistance movement through a protracted war of attrition.

Even though the Soviet army began fighting a proper counterinsurgency war from 1983 onwards, the strategy of containment remained very much in force. Through use of combined arms warfare, involving extensive use of heliborne and airborne troops in conjunction with sharp armored ground offensives, the Soviets for the first time since the invasion started regaining the initiative by putting the Mujahideen on the defensive. Still, the offensives were short-lived and limited in nature resulting in reoccupation of territory by the Mujahideen immediately after the Soviet troop disengagement and departure.

Another Soviet tactic was what Louis Dupree referred to as the "migratory genocide" policy. According to him, "The Russians are not trying to control Afghanistan, but to destroy it; their aim is not to kill the Afghans, but to drive them out of the country."²⁰ These terror tactics - indiscriminate bombings, attacks on civilians, destruction of crops and animals and levelling of villages thought to be sympathetic to the Mujahideen - were employed to intimidate and terrorize the population into withdrawing support from the guerrillas. These measures decimated Afghanistan as the results indicate;

1.5 million Afghans perished, 5 million fled the country and took refuge in Pakistan and Iran, and close to two million Afghans became internal refugees - displaced persons with no regular means of survival.²¹

Agriculture during this period dropped from 85 percent in 1978 to 23 percent in 1987.

The severity of these measures failed to break the will of the people. Indeed, the Afghans were further alienated and angered while the Mujahideen gained additional mass support.

Throughout these years, the Soviet army was handicapped by an increasingly unreliable Afghan army beset by desertions and lack of commitment. Despite repeated efforts, the strength of the Afghan army stayed close to the 30,000 mark.

The Soviet efforts to win legitimacy for the Afghan government, likewise, ended in abject failure. The Karmal regime, imposed on the Afghans by a foreign, atheistic power, possessed no legitimacy and was rent by internal conflicts. The Afghan government was not just a Soviet puppet, it was virtually a Soviet prisoner. According to a U.S. State Department document, "Nearly every ministry except the foreign ministry was openly under Soviet control. All press releases were cleared by Soviets and even the new constitution was drafted by Soviet officials.²² External recognition was also not forthcoming as shown by President Zia Ul Haq of Pakistan,

who commented in 1982 that "Pakistan will not talk to this man who came to be the head of the Afghan regime by riding on Soviet tanks."²³ Najibullah, who replaced Karmal in 1986, was handpicked by the Soviets but suffered from the same dilemmas that paralyzed his predecessor's regime.

Though guerrilla operations inside in Afghanistan were supported by both Pakistan and Iran. The former, because of its close ties with the USA and China, came in for especially harsh treatment from the Soviets who denounced Pakistan as one of the "chief instruments of interference, dragged in by the United States". The Soviets tried to intimidate Pakistan by threats, over flights and terrorist activities inside Pakistan. In 1986 Afghanistan had committed 427 ground and 45 air violations on Pakistan-Afghanistan border.²⁴ Terrorist activities continued unabated throughout the occupation years and consisted mainly of bombings and assassinations. The Soviet treatment of Iran was less harsh and tempered with caution as Russia was greatly interested in wooing Iran and filling the vacuum created by the American departure.

The Soviet Union offered proposals for withdrawal from Afghanistan as early as February 1980 and continued until the final withdrawal. However, the earlier proposals were mainly aimed at reducing international censure as well as gaining recognition for the DRA regime. The proposals also invariably shifted blame and

responsibility for continued state of chaos in Afghanistan on external forces. According to Brezhnev:

U.S. and Chinese intervention brought Soviet forces into Afghanistan. If the United States, Iran and Pakistan would guarantee the cessation of interference then the need for Soviet military assistance would no longer exist.²⁵

The occupation years were also marked by a methodical Soviet strategy to Sovietize Afghanistan. The economy, military, political institutions and even the educational system were remodeled to imitate the Soviet pattern. According to one source, by 1985 more than 60,000 Afghans of all ages had been sent to the Soviet Union and its satellite for varying durations. The purpose of these visits was training and indoctrination.²⁶ -Reportedly, a 20,000 man military force indoctrinated in Marxist ideology and extremely loyal to the PDRA was being specially trained in the USSR for the purpose of taking over military functions on departure of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

Anti-Soviet guerrilla operations were conducted by the Mujahideen who were controlled by a loose alliance of seven parties (four fundamentalists and three moderates) based in Pakistan. A smaller alliance of eight Shia parties was similarly based in Iran. By 1983 almost every one of Afghanistan's 28 provinces had at least three Peshawar based organizations represented.²⁷ Mujahideen tactics consisted of daytime ambushes of highway convoys, night attacks on fortified positions and assassinations of

DRA party officials and Soviet personnel. Though the resistance initially lacked modern weapons and equipment, and used the DRA and Soviets as their main source of supply, the situation gradually changed with the influx of U.S. assistance in the eighties. In 1986 on receipt of the U.S. made Stinger, the Afghan resistance went on the offensive against the Soviets who had almost neutralized the Mujahideen through extensive use of attack helicopters.²⁸ Though aid was received from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China, Iran and other Islamic states, the United States was the major donor who in 1988 alone provided an average of \$100 million a month worth of arms.²⁹

By 1986, with mounting costs and no end in sight the Soviets seriously started exploring avenues to extricate themselves from the Afghan quagmire.

THE WITHDRAWAL

The Soviet decision to pull its forces out of Afghanistan was markedly inconsistent with historical Russian and Soviet policy. It was not only, as President Zia said, "miraculous," but also incredible.³⁰ Allison declares that:

The reverberations in Soviet satellite and client states will be significant since defeat in Afghanistan rolls back for the first time the Brezhnev doctrine of the irreversibility of communist gains.³¹

United Nations sponsored efforts for a negotiated settlement were convened in June 1982 and proved inconclusive. Stumbling blocks included a timetable for the Soviet troop withdrawal, measures to end arms shipments to the resistance and definition of the post-withdrawal form of government in Afghanistan.³²

The situation remained in disarray until the spring of 1988, when the Soviets evidently calculated that the costs of the continued Afghan occupation exceeded the likely gains. As a result, on April 14, 1988 the Geneva Accords were signed by the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. An additional "Declaration of International Guarantees" was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union as states-guarantors. The agreement stipulated that the withdrawal would be completed within ten months (15 February 1989) and that Soviet and U.S. arms shipments would remain symmetrical during the withdrawal period. Most significant, no preconditions for the make-up of the post-withdrawal government were set. Hence, the Soviets agreed to withdraw without a guarantee of survival of the DRA regime in Kabul.³³

Strictly according to the agreement, the Soviets on 15 February 1989 completed the withdrawal of all uniformed forces from Afghanistan. The factors that led to this dramatic development deserve some elaboration. The Soviet decision to withdraw was influenced by three principal

factors: the military situation, the international climate, and domestic concerns.

Militarily, even after suffering 13,310 killed; 35,478 wounded; and 311 missing, the Soviets were unable to win the war against the Afghan resistance.³⁴ In addition to sustaining large equipment losses to improved weapons and tactics of the resistance, the Soviet forces were adversely affected by the protracted war resulting in lack of motivation, addiction to drugs and even desertion. The Soviets apparently decided early in the war that a major escalation of their military effort would not only be cost ineffective but would not guarantee success against a guerrilla force supported by the population and operating in rugged largely inaccessible terrain.³⁵

Outside support of the resistance was clearly a vital factor in its success. The supply of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles by the United States in 1986 deprived the Soviets of the close air support on which their military tactics so heavily depended. The Soviets, despite military and diplomatic pressure, were unable to dissuade Pakistan from acting as the conduit through which the resistance obtained arms.

The foreign policy costs incurred by the Soviets were also heavy. Each year since the invasion, the United Nations General Assembly has overwhelmingly voted for the withdrawal of "foreign forces" from Afghanistan.

Non-aligned and Islamic countries were especially alienated, while China established withdrawal as a pre-condition for improving ties with the USSR. Similarly, Soviet efforts to improve relations with the United States and other western countries were adversely affected. Improvement of relations with the West was particularly important for the success of Gorbachev's 'Perestroika' policy and for his related efforts to achieve significant arms reduction agreements.

Domestically, opposition to the war became more widespread as Soviet casualties mounted. In addition, returning veterans brought back drugs and psychological problems home from the battle front.³⁶ Soviet domestic reaction was perhaps best summed up by a comment by the letters editor of Izvestia that, "judging by our mail, it would be difficult to find another step more welcome in this country than the end of this war."³⁷ Gorbachev's need for public support for his domestic policies provided a motivation for him to end such an unpopular war which he too publicly termed as "a bleeding wound."³⁸ Moreover, the economic and military costs incurred by the Soviets during the occupation years amounted to \$50 billion and this was seen as an additional burden on the already strained and overextended Soviet economy.³⁹

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CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

We have not succeeded in everything we planned to do here -- we came here with an honorable task, with open hearts. We are leaving and we have a sense of not having accomplished our mission to the end.¹

General Serebrov
Soviet Military Headquarters
Kabul, Afghanistan
22 January 1989

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 improved the USSR's geostrategic position by giving it additional leverage against Pakistan and Iran, and by moving Soviet power significantly closer to the oil rich Persian Gulf. Fundamentally, however, the Soviet intervention was a defensive move designed to ensure the security of their Southern frontier and protection of their interests in Afghanistan.

After a costly occupation lasting over nine years, the Soviets withdrew, leaving Afghanistan in even worse condition than it was on the eve of invasion in December 1979. Afghanistan had been economically devastated and politically and socially fragmented; war related deaths exceeded a million and a half, while a third of its population had been uprooted and forced as refugees to Pakistan and Iran.

However, even after this protracted struggle, the Soviets were still not close to attaining their pre-invasion objectives, namely: ensuring the political

stability of their client government in Kabul and establishing control over the countryside which had slipped into the Mujahideen control. Though a combination of military, economic and domestic factors in conjunction with intense international pressures triggered the withdrawal, the situation was far from desperate for the Soviets who, along with the PDRA regime, were generally well placed in the urban areas.

The 1989 withdrawal under these circumstances is, thus, not only intriguing, but apparently also contradicts the Soviet rationale that formed the basis of the 1979 invasion. The Soviets, according to General Serebrov were "leaving with a sense of not having accomplished our mission to the end."² Indeed, the Soviet Union withdrew military forces from Afghanistan after nine years, an estimated 13,000 killed in action, and \$50 billion expended to support their policies - without achieving victory. Again, the withdrawal of Soviet forces represented a major departure from previous Soviet behavior and challenged the validity of Brezhnev's doctrine of irreversibility of Communist expansion.³ In the Soviet Union, the withdrawal, though welcomed, opened a heated controversy over Afghanistan. In the bitter debate that followed, not only was the invasion regarded as a mistake but the blame was openly and squarely laid on the shoulders of the late Brezhnev.⁴ Aleksandr Prokhanov, a well known Soviet novelist famous for his

patriotic themes, questioned the very essence of the Soviet policy in Afghanistan.

Why did we send the troops in? What aims were we pursuing? Did we achieve those aims, or not? What will happen after the withdrawal of the troops? What was the price of our limited contingent in Afghanistan? All these questions will be posed firmly, and I predict that the answers to them will provide agonizing grounds for prolonged, unabating polemics.⁵

Conceding that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a policy blunder, does the withdrawal signal an end to the Soviet involvement? Does the withdrawal imply that the Soviet Union has not only abandoned its interests in Afghanistan but will also refrain from pursuing an active policy in Southwest Asia? The author believes that this is not the case.

As a starting point, it should be understood that though the Soviets were bogged down in the Afghan quagmire, the withdrawal was voluntary, and conducted in the best interests of the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev, in his 7 December 1988 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, said:

We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions. But neither do we have any intention to be hemmed in by your values.⁶

The implication was clear. Though overly optimistic conclusions regarding the withdrawal had termed this dramatic event as a fundamental shift from the totalitarian, imperialist, and expansionist Soviet policies of the past, Gorbachev had indicated in his

speech that essentially the goals would remain the same though the means would be different.

Contrary to widespread belief, it is not true that the Soviet Union had, then or now, suffered a military defeat. At any time in Afghanistan, the Soviets did not field more than 3-4 percent of their military might, and though they reserved the option of escalating the war, they refrained from doing so.⁷

It is a truism, though, that the Soviets having failed to achieve a quick success that would erase the issue from international attention, did constantly search for solutions that would grant them an honorable extrication from the increasingly embarrassing Afghan situation.

These efforts under the successive leadership of Brezhnev, Chernenko and Andropov lacked total commitment. Each of them had been involved in the original decision to invade and hence hesitated in accepting a policy failure. With Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in March 1985, events took a dramatic turn. In essence, his perestroika (economic restructuring) policy laid the foundations of a bold Soviet initiative in Afghanistan. His mandate calls for a reversal of the trend of the last decade as a pre-condition for the entry of the Soviet Union in the 21st century as a great power. Representing a rare combination of pragmatic realism on the one hand, and

creative policy making and public relations on the other, Gorbachev has inspired an inventiveness in Soviet policy, foreign and domestic, not seen since the death of Lenin.⁸ His stunning admission of the failure of the Socialist economic system, which in the USSR had stagnated at virtually zero growth by the early 1980s, is evident by his proclamations: "The economy is in a mess; we are behind in every area.... The closer you look, the worse it is."⁹ Indeed, the Soviet economy is not only falling further behind the United States, Western Europe and Japan, but it is also losing ground even to the new industrial countries of Asia.

At its core, Gorbachev's new thinking is a radical rejection of the Stalinism that ruled the Soviet Union for more than half a century.¹⁰ Under his leadership, the Soviet Union has embarked on major domestic reforms and proclaimed the need for new political thinking in international relations.¹¹ The new thinking embraces a number of propositions about the nature of international relations in the modern world: common human values and interests take precedence over the interests of any class; the world has become complex and increasingly interdependent and as such the states must face 'global problems' transcending national boundaries such as economic interdependence and environmental concerns. There can be no victors in a nuclear war; security has to be based increasingly on political rather than military

instruments; and the complex and multifaceted nature of international relations demands foreign policy flexibility and compromise.¹²

The primary implications of these fundamental changes for Soviet national security policies are increased subordination of foreign policy to domestic priorities and the necessity to reduce investments in the defense sector. In order to address long-term problems successfully, a pre-condition is substantial relaxation of competition with the United States in the international arena. Moreover, large-scale restructuring of the Soviet economy will require resources now consumed by the Soviet military.¹³

Though, the new thinking does not envisage the abandonment of superpower role by the USSR, it does present the Soviet Union as more cooperative and less threatening by assigning a less important role to conflict in international relations.¹⁴ Indeed, in pursuit of a stable and cooperative relationship with the United States, Gorbachev gained immense credibility by the adoption of some practical measures, unprecedented in recent Soviet history - signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, working for the settlement of regional disputes, announcing unilateral troop cuts, and beginning the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.¹⁵

The Afghan war was a negation of the new thinking and Gorbachev immediately realized that as long as the war went on the new image of the Soviet Union that he was desperately trying to forge - that of a peace loving, pro-disarmament nation seeking economic modernisation - would never attain credibility with the United States in particular and the West in general. In addition, the withdrawal would not only successfully meet one of the Chinese pre-conditions for improved Sino-Soviet relations, but also lead to improvement of relations with the non-aligned and Islamic worlds. Lastly, while the withdrawal enhanced Gorbachev's credibility abroad, on the home front, where the Afghan war was increasingly viewed unfavourably, it was used as an instrument in mobilizing popular support for his domestic reforms.

The peace process, under the United Nations auspices, began in 1981 with indirect negotiations between Pakistan and the DRA regime, which was not recognised by the former. The negotiations were formally convened in pursuance of the General Assembly resolution of November 1981 which listed four essentials for a political solution: (1) the preservation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and non-aligned character of Afghanistan; (2) the right of the Afghan people to determine their own form of government and to choose their economic, political and social system free from outside intervention, subversion, coercion or

restraint of any kind whatsoever; (3) the immediate withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan; (4) the creation of necessary conditions which would enable the Afghan refugees to return voluntarily to their homes in safety and honour.

The negotiations dragged on till 1985 and no headway could be made due to disagreements on the scheduling of the Soviet troop withdrawal. Following his accession to power in 1985, Gorbachev tried to seek a way out of Afghanistan, at first through direct military means.¹⁶ Soviet military action intensified against both the Mujahideen and the civilian population. Simultaneously, pressures on Pakistan were escalated through political means, military incidents and greatly increased terrorist subversion.¹⁷ Within a year after reassessing the military situation the Soviets decided that direct military assistance to the Afghan regime was no longer practical. Instead, they sought a gradual phasing out of Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, mixed with efforts towards a political solution that could at the very least ensure that a less than hostile government was left standing in Kabul. The intensification of Soviet military action in Afghanistan combined with significantly enlarged covert U.S. aid estimated at \$600 million a year to the resistance, suddenly revived the almost dead Geneva negotiations which

once again focused on the withdrawal of Soviet military forces as their primary if not their sole goal.¹⁸

The Soviet actions, henceforth, comprised feverish attempts to strengthen their client government as well as trying to attempt the formation of a national reconciliation government under the PDPA leadership. In 1987, the Soviets essentially gave the Afghan Communists a year to consolidate their base of power with the help of Soviet troops. During Najibullah's visit to Moscow in July 1987, he was told by Gorbachev that "I hope you are ready in twelve months because we will be leaving whether you are or not."¹⁹ The Geneva peace process took a quantum leap by Gorbachev's dramatic February 8, 1988 proposal in which he proposed a ten month time table for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. At this stage, it also became known that the United States would be committing itself to cut off all U.S. military aid to the resistance when the Soviet troop withdrawal began.²⁰ The Accords were strongly opposed by the Afghan resistance, the refugees and Pakistan, which came under immense Soviet pressure to sign the accords. Under these circumstances, the Soviets first threatened to cancel their troop withdrawal and then reversed their position, saying that withdrawal would begin whether the accords were signed or not.

The United States Senate, outraged by the official U.S. stand, condemned the text of the accords as a

'shameful sellout' and unanimously passed a resolution on February 29, 1988 calling for continuation of U.S. aid of all kinds to the Afghan resistance as long as Soviet aid went to the Kabul regime.²¹ The State Department accordingly reformulated U.S. policy to require "symmetry" - U.S. military aid to the Afghan resistance as long as USSR provided similar aid to its client regime in Kabul.²² Denouncing the new U.S. policy of symmetry, the Soviets declared that they would provide assistance of all kinds to the Kabul regime, indefinitely and in accordance with the Afghan-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1921.

Pakistan, meanwhile, strengthened by the Senate resolution, called for the establishment of an independent interim government. Without a government acceptable to the Afghan people, the 3.5 million refugees living in Pakistan for almost a decade would refuse to go back home. In the end, combined U.S. pressure and Soviet threats forced Pakistan to acquiesce and the still secret accords were signed on April 14, 1988 and entered into force on May 15, 1988 as the USSR had insisted all along. One resistance leader summed up the resistance and the refugee reaction to the accords, "everything we fought for is lost. We have been betrayed."²⁴

The Geneva Accords are composed of four distinct parts. Out of these, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed three bilateral agreements intended to end the war in

Afghanistan. The fourth document, "Declaration on International Guarantees", was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union as states-guarantors.

The first bilateral agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, "Principles of Mutual Relations, on Non-Interference and Non-Intervention," binds the two countries to refrain from various specified activities that could constitute interference in one another's affairs. Its detailed clauses effectively close off every means by which Pakistan could assist, or could permit its territory to be used to assist, the Afghan resistance. Soviet military presence or indeed any form of Soviet involvement is totally excluded.²⁵ The appearance is thereby created that Pakistan (and the foreign aid that flowed through it) is at the root of the Afghanistan problem, not the USSR and hence, the real withdrawal from Afghan affairs was to be effected by Pakistan, not the Soviet Union.²⁶

The second bilateral agreement deals with the "voluntary return of refugees" within 18 months and makes no provision for refugees who may not choose to return to their homeland under the present conditions.

The withdrawal of uniformed Soviet military forces is mentioned only in the bilateral Pakistan-Afghan "Agreement on the Inter-Relationships for the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan." The agreement refers only to uniformed forces, and does not specify the

number of troops present in Afghanistan or to be withdrawn; it includes no restriction on any future return of Soviet troops; it does not require the dismantling of massive Soviet installations, many of them underground; and it makes no mention of the thousands of other, non-uniformed Soviet forces and personnel in Afghanistan - military, civilian and KGB - who control all the agencies of the Afghan government.²⁷ Rosanne Klass further claims that information provided by captured or defecting Soviets and Afghan Communists, indicates that several thousand Soviet Central Asian troops of all ranks were seconded to the Afghan armed forces. They were to wear Afghan uniforms and assume Afghan identity.²⁸

The "Declaration on International Guarantees" signed by the United States and the Soviet Union commits them to non-interference and non-intervention. It also commits them to respect the Afghan-Pakistan non-interference accord. However, the U.S. concept of "symmetry" and the Soviet Union's insistence that aid would continue to Afghanistan on a legal state-state basis, appears to contradict the guarantees that were signed.

In addition to these drawbacks, the accords suffer from some serious omissions: (1) the Afghan resistance was not part of the Geneva talks and has vowed to continue the war until the Soviet client regime is ousted from power in Kabul and (2) the failure of the accords to

address the issue of self-determination for the Afghan people constituted their fundamental flaw. This aspect besides ensuring the transition to peace in the country is an important pre-condition for the return of the refugees.

Through skillful use of diplomacy and intimidation, Mikhail Gorbachev had converted an accepted policy failure into a brilliant triumph. The accords served completely the Soviet purpose of orchestrating an honorable withdrawal from an increasingly difficult situation. Of the four essentials listed in the United Nations General Assembly resolution of November 1981, only one had been met. The accords, themselves, besides ensuring the Soviet withdrawal - which the Soviets wanted in the first place - did not resolve any other outstanding issue such as the return of the refugees and the type and form of the future government in Afghanistan.

Despite the accords, the Soviet Union continues to mount an unprecedented supply effort, and, according to U.S. government estimates, \$2 billion in military equipment had been flown in by October 1989.²⁹ The Soviets now also regard their client regime as a formidable force and capable of holding out in the urban areas. The Soviet trained Afghan army was also reportedly reinforced by a specially trained secret Afghan unit numbering 15,000 to 20,000. Exclusively trained in the Soviet Union, the unit was held in reserve to replace the Soviets on their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The regime

also boasts well paid paramilitary forces totaling more than 100,000 including locally based militias. With an estimated annual budget of \$160 million, the KHAD/WAD, the Afghan secret police, trained by and modelled on the KGB maintains its presence in all major government ministries and departments.

The withdrawal also provided some windfall benefits for the Soviet Union: it provided immense credibility to Gorbachev's new thinking; increased popular support at home; led to the improvement of ties with China, Iran and the rest of the Islamic world; and effectively created major rifts within the resistance depriving the latter of a common atheist enemy.

However, the total disregard of the Soviets for the Afghan self-determination leads one to believe that while withdrawal was conducted under compulsion, the Soviets do not intend to abandon their interests in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, the Geneva Accords' main weakness is that they do not address the primary element of conflict, the Soviet political-administrative control over Afghanistan. As long as the massive Soviet political and economic control remains, Afghanistan will never be a truly independent sovereign country. Since 1986 hundreds of agreements, treaties and protocols were concluded between the Afghan regime and the USSR and the East European countries. These give the Soviets and their allies total control of Afghanistan's economy, its rich

national resources, education, media and other social and political institutions. Political and economic structures are being set up to control and possibly detach the mineral rich provinces north of the Hindukush Mountains from the southern areas which have been so devastated by the war.³⁰

The strategically located Wakhan Corridor, annexed by the Soviet Union in May 1980 and confirmed by a secret treaty in June 1981, remains firmly in the Soviet control.³¹

Gorbachev had emerged on the scene in 1985 with a clear sense of purpose - to check and reverse the Soviet Union's historic decline at home and abroad.³² The 'new thinking' is a sophisticated, pragmatic and a realistic approach to counter the problem. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was certainly a consequence of this dynamic new approach. However, it must be understood that the increased subordination of foreign policy to domestic priorities, aimed at redressing the afflictions of the Soviet economy at home and the growing irrelevance of its ideology abroad, requires that, for the time being, traditional goals be pursued by means other than those based on their formidable military might. Again, while expansionist policies may have been accorded an extremely low priority, the Soviets will certainly not compromise on issues related to the security of their motherland. Afghanistan and any security threats it presents will

remain indefinitely just south of the Soviet border and it would be unrealistic to expect USSR suddenly to abandon a policy based on at least a century of patient diplomacy. Expansion of influence will, therefore, continue but in a more indirect, subtle manner involving lower costs and fewer risks. The Soviets, with their bitter experience in Afghanistan, are now aware of the difficulties involved in establishing a Socialist or 'Socialist oriented' state in an underdeveloped, theocratic third world country through the imposition of a militarized Marxist-Leninist party. As with the pre-Saur Revolution regimes, the Soviet Union is most likely to deal with any future government, regardless of its political complexion, in order to protect its interests in Afghanistan. Barnett Rubin adds:

Ruling out direct military intervention does not mean that the Soviets consider they have defined themselves less ideologically and concluded that they can better protect these interests in other ways.³³

FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

The Geneva Accords provided an avenue for an 'honorable' Soviet exit from Afghanistan, but failed to offer peace to the war devastated country. With the Afghan resistance vehemently opposed the accords to which it was not a party, and with the Soviet Union and the USA committed to continue military assistance to their respective clients, the war was destined to go on.

However, contrary to the widely held belief at the time that the Soviet backed Kabul regime would speedily

collapse in the wake of the Russian troop withdrawal, the situation remains stalemated in Afghanistan. Though the resistance controls most of the countryside, the Kabul regime remains entrenched in all the major cities, and hence has been able to maintain control of the main territorial components of state power in Afghanistan.

Why did the resistance offensive campaign stagnate, and what are Afghanistan's future political and social prospects? To answer these vital questions it is important to understand the Afghan psyche and the changes - social, political and ideological - brought about by the war.

Afghanistan's deeply divided national identity is evident in its patchwork of 21 distinct ethnic groups, further subdivided by linguistic, tribal, religious, and clan affiliations, and broken into small physical - and hence political - units by the geography of steep mountains and isolated valleys.³⁵ Moreover, it is a deeply traditional country, inhabited by fiercely independent people, highly averse to foreign intervention, direct or indirect. While Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan, the inherent disunity and, at times, fierce enmity, amongst the Afghans tended to be obscured by the unifying power of the Muslim Jihad (struggle) against a foreign and non-Muslim invader. However, with the departure of the Soviets, the traditional divisions amongst the Afghans quickly resurfaced. These divisions -

between fundamentalists and traditionalists (moderates), between Sunnis and Shiites, between ethnic groups, and between the local commanders and the Peshawar based seven party coalition - resulted in a near total fragmentation of society, grossly weakened the resistance war effort, and ultimately provided desperately awaited relief to the beleaguered Kabul regime.

Though most of these differences have always been prevalent in the Afghan society, the rifts were widened considerably during the course of the war. Afghanistan, which used to be an overwhelmingly rural society, has undergone a process of urbanization through internal migrations towards the big cities (mainly Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif), and emigration from the country to border cities in Pakistan and Iran. The war also introduced a new leadership in the form of either young, middle class, educated Islamists or members of the traditional Ulema, usually also young.³⁶ These young Islamist intellectuals, lacking the legitimacy (based on family connections) according to traditional patterns, rooted themselves in traditional society by using, on one hand, new political patterns, such as affiliation to a political party, implementation of Shariat and military efficiency. On the other hand, they adopted some traditional methods of power such as distributing weapons as a tool of influence, forging personal ties with other leaders and

establishing a patron-client relationship with their followers.³⁷

The war also changed the ethnic balance in Afghanistan. Not only do the dominant Pashtuns comprise the bulk of the refugees but a significant number of Pashtuns who established themselves in northern Afghanistan returned to the south or to Pakistan. Thus, the weight of the traditionally dominant Pashtuns has been reduced, but not their pretensions to rule Afghanistan, as is evident by the predominantly Pashtun nature of the Kabul and Peshawar elites. However, the opposition between the Durrani on one hand, and Ghilzai and the eastern Pashtuns on the other, makes the emergence of an 'all Pashtun' party or coalition seem improbable.³⁸

The war also raised ethnic awareness and self-assertion among the weaker ethnic groups. The Tajiks not only proved themselves militarily, but also produced legendary figures like Commander Ahmed Shah Masud. The formerly despised Shia Hazaras gained a stake in the regional balance of power by establishing control over the whole of the Hazarajat province. Of the ethnic groups in the northern Afghanistan, the Uzbeks tended to be more receptive towards Soviet propaganda, while the Turkmens remained fiercely anti-Soviet.

The Afghan resistance movement is directed mainly by a loose coalition of seven parties (Islamic Union of Mujahideen of Afghanistan or IUAM) based in Peshawar.

Most of the field commanders engaged in the actual fighting inside Afghanistan are affiliated with one of the seven parties either on the basis of ideology or simple pragmatism since the parties function as transmitters of arms, refugee relief, and other forms of patronage. The field commanders, however, enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy, and apart from accepting some guidance are not controlled by the parties. Strong commanders like Masud and Ismael Khan have created their own administrations in the liberated areas.

The politics of the resistance have been shaped by both Islamic ideology and the ethnic composition of the leadership. Of the seven leaders of the Peshawar alliance, six are Pashtun while one is a Tajik. Furthermore, the alliance is dominated by fundamentalists of whom Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Zia protege, is the most radical. Rasul Sayyaf, another fundamentalist, is heavily funded by Saudi Arabia.³⁹ The IUAM also acts as the representative of over three and a half million refugees in Pakistan. In Iran, an alliance of eight Shiite parties look after the interests of the two million refugees in Iran and also directs operations inside Afghanistan, mainly in Hazarajat.

Immediately prior to the completion of the Soviet withdrawal on February 15, 1989, Pakistan and the United States pressured the IUAM into convening a Shura (consultative council) to choose an interim government.

This step was taken as an attempt to give the resistance a more state-like political structure, which would enable it to represent the Afghans internationally, to coordinate the final offensive against the PDPA, and to assume power following the expected collapse of the Kabul regime. However, at this crucial juncture, political, ethnic and religious considerations dominated the proceedings, resulting in the failure of the Shura to produce a broad based government and, hence, exacerbated rather than resolved conflicts among the Mujahideen.⁴⁰ Some of the major power groups which remained unrepresented included the Iran based Shiite alliance, the powerful field commanders inside Afghanistan and ethnic groups like the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and the Durrani branch of the Pashtuns. The entire Shura was thus composed of delegates selected by the seven leaders of the Pakistan based alliance. The proceedings were characterized by intensive power brokering, increasingly visible influence of Saudi Arabia, and most important, by the open claim of the Ghilzai Pashtuns to determine the political future of Afghanistan. The choice of Rasul Sayyaf, a Wahhabi Muslim, as the prime minister, and the role of Saudi money, besides alienating the Shia and the Iranians, intensified the bitter resentment many Sunni Afghans felt at what they perceived as Saudi attempts to buy their loyalty.⁴¹

The Afghan Interim Government (AIG) remained highly unrepresentative. The Shiite Hazaras, already alienated by the strong anti-Shia bias harbored by the Pashtuns, became openly hostile, while the field commanders, who represent the strongest constituency inside Afghanistan, expressed utter disgust and open criticism of the AIG. The commanders were further antagonized when they were not consulted. Nor were their local Shuras recognized as the base of a new representative and administrative structure for the future Afghan state, even after the formation of the AIG.

These serious divisions played a major role in the most crucial event since the Soviet withdrawal, the battle of Jalalabad. Jalalabad had been chosen by the AIG in order to establish itself on Afghan territory and hence gain both international recognition and credibility as a genuine contender for state power.⁴² Jalalabad, a fortified and well defended city, was subjected to a hasty, poorly coordinated frontal assault in April, with disastrous results.

Though it is true that the Mujahideen lacked heavy armament essential for the conduct of conventional, pitched battles, such as artillery and mine clearing equipment, and were still exposed to hostile air power, internal dissensions, reflecting the AIG's lack of command and control, were also instrumental in crippling the offensive.⁴³ The Kabul government was able to repulse

the siege due to the failure of the rival Mujahideen parties to relieve one another in rotation in order to keep the Jalalabad-Kabul road closed. The Persian speaking Tajik Mujahideen abstained from fighting out of resentment over the treatment of their party, Rabbani's Islamic party, at the Shura. Some Mujahideen opposed letting the Wahhabis and Arabs approach Jalalabad through the Kunar Valley. Lastly, the offensive was partly predicated on the expectation of massive defections, yet, these did not materialize due to several instances involving brutal massacres of defectors by the Mujahideen in the past.⁴⁴

Kandahar, which was to be attacked simultaneously as a diversionary target, never saw battle due to the non-compliance of field commanders. Unlike Jalalabad, which falls in the Ghilzai area, Kandahar is predominantly a Durrani territory; hence the lack of commitment and enthusiasm on part of the locals to implement the rival Ghilzai plan.

While rivalries and even sporadic armed confrontations had long plagued the Afghan resistance, the alliance's growing disunity following the Soviet withdrawal soon led to internecine combat on a larger scale.⁴⁶ By late summer, Mujahideen in at least three provinces were fighting prolonged battles among themselves on such a large scale that the combatants had to summon reinforcements from among their allies.⁴⁷ One major

incident involved the killing of 30 senior commanders and Mujahideen loyal to Ahmed Shah Masud, the Tajik leader in northeastern Afghanistan, in an ambush by guerrillas of Hekmatyar's Islamic party. As fighting escalated between Masud and Hekmatyar groups, the AIG President Mojaddedi openly denounced Hekmatyar as a "criminal" and a "terrorist".⁴⁸ Such infighting, along with other manifestations of chaos and indiscipline among the Mujahideen, has also discouraged those Afghan army personnel, PDPA officials, and government employees who had been expected to surrender or defect to the guerrillas.⁴⁹

The Mujahideen's fractiousness and inability to form an alternative to the PDPA government provided Najibullah with a prime opportunity to extend his own base of power. The PDPA's post-Soviet withdrawal strategy encompasses holding of Kabul and other major cities in strength, making the regime more acceptable by dropping socialist ideology and slogans, and exploiting the rapidly emerging rifts in the Mujahideen ranks. Najibullah has even offered individual truces to local guerrilla commanders who agree to stop fighting the government. Under such a truce, the government would recognize local resistance commanders as official authorities, permit them to retain their weapons, and provide them with aid, all without even requiring them to recognize the central government authority formally. Barnett Rubin adds:

It is a testimony to the strength of the Islamic ideology and the hatred inspired by the PDPA's record of terror and subservience to the Soviet Union that hardly, if any, have accepted the offer, even though they are more generous than anything the AIG has proposed to them.⁵⁰

The PDPA, too, suffers from factional disunity, of which the most important element is the conflict between the Khalqi dominated army the Parchami dominated KHAD/WAD (secret police). Another significant liability to the Kabul regime is the original stigma attached to it for having cooperated with the Soviets brutal invasion and occupation.

Thus, no political entity of Afghanistan enjoys anything close to monopoly control over the territory and population - the basic criterion for a state. However, the Kabul regime retains a substantial advantage in the military sphere since it is the only party with a regular army equipped with reasonably modern weapon systems. The Soviets, too, continue their efforts in providing massive military support to their client regime. In 1989 alone, the Soviets had supplied \$2 billion in military equipment to the Kabul regime.⁵¹

A year after the completion of the Soviet troop withdrawal, Afghanistan's agony continues unabated. As various Afghan groups vie for supremacy in a fierce and bloody power struggle, over 5 million refugees, fearful of the highly fluid and unstable conditions inside Afghanistan, remain in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran.

Is there a solution to the Afghan impasse? The central problem remains the establishment of a legitimate, however weak, national government in Afghanistan. The PDPA might be able to remain in power in Kabul, capitalizing on the resistance disunity and Soviet support, and to reach open or implicit deals with commanders in different areas of the country, but it will not be able to claim their allegiance. While some order might be established gradually in the process, it would remain grudging and precarious. The refugees would not risk returning, power would remain highly fragmented and reconstruction would be difficult.⁵²

On the other hand, the Mujahideen at present seem incapable of producing a quick military victory due to their inherent liabilities - disunity based on personal, ethnic and ideological differences, and difficulties in making the transition from guerrilla fighting to conventional warfare. Even if such a victory could be achieved, the likely outcome would not be the resolution of the conflict but most probably a new round of civil war. Though there is no single ethnic party in the seven party alliance, the growing assertiveness of Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks might compel them to dispute a central government comprised mainly of Ghilzai Pashtuns.

Efforts to solve the Afghan problem through political means have also made no significant headway. The Soviet proposals include the formation of a

'Government of National Reconciliation' which includes representatives of all segments of society, but led by the PDPA. Gorbachev has also proposed 'negative symmetry' or a mutual halt in assistance to both parties. The United States, meanwhile, opposes negative symmetry on the grounds that the Soviets have created a new imbalance by supplying high technology weapons and massive stockpiles since their withdrawal. The USA continues to support the IAG as the core of a new government for Afghanistan, and it insists on the resignation of Najibullah before the beginning of negotiations on a political settlement.'³

The peace proposal initiated by exiled King Zahir Shah, which calls for the formation of the Loya Jirga (grand council), comprised of 800 representatives including 27 members of the PDPA, has met with some approval from all groups but is ridden with complications. Moreover, the Mujahideen and Pakistan strongly oppose any role in the future Afghan government for Zahir Shah.

In the absence of a military or a political solution to the problem for the foreseeable future, a possible outcome is the 'Lebanonization' of Afghanistan or a period of anarchy and rule by local commanders and warlords. The Afghan society is no stranger to such an arrangement. Historically, the central government in Afghanistan has exercised power in the countryside through military-political commanders and influential figures

holding regional bases of power. The only difference in this case would be the affiliation of these 'warlords' to external influencing powers like USA, USSR, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The crux of the matter is that the Soviet Union will not yield its influence in Afghanistan. Although, the Soviets have conceded the futility of imposing socialist ideology on an underdeveloped, traditionally independent, and deeply religious third world country, they have not abandoned their interests and have shown increasing willingness to establish a working relationship with any future regime, regardless of ideology. The fragmentation of society apparent in the form of ethnic, political and ideological divisions serves to weaken rather than strengthen Afghanistan. The Soviets have been able to achieve with their withdrawal what they failed to attain on the Afghan battlefield.

In the worse case scenario, in which the Soviet client regime is decisively defeated and power is assumed by the pro-U.S. resistance, the USSR still retains the option of creating a separate Afghan state in the north. The north is not only geographically separated from the south by the Hindu Kush mountains but is also inhabited by the Uzbeks, Turkomans and Tajiks - all ethnically related to the inhabitants of the southern USSR. This would satisfy the Soviet concern for security to its southern flank and also allow the continued exploitation of natural

resources, especially natural gas, which are located mainly in the north.

The present stalemate in the country, created both by the failure of the Mujahideen resistance to unify and lead the Afghan population on one hand, and the continuation of massive Soviet military, political, and economic support to the Kabul regime on the other, favors the USSR. The Soviets are counting heavily on the cumulative impact of their extensive pacification/Sovietization efforts and the lack of progress of the resistance in paving the way for the submission of the population. As a Soviet official in Kabul remarked, "Time changes everything. In another 10 or 20 years, the new generation of Afghans will view our presence differently."³⁴ This strategic time tested approach worked successfully in Central Asia in 1920's and 1930's and the Soviets are confident that it will also work in Afghanistan.

After more than a decade of bloodshed, suffering, and violence, Afghanistan's situation remains highly complicated and explosive. However, whatever course the war weary country takes in the future, one thing is for certain - the Soviet influence will be extensive.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan, since its independence in 1947, has never enjoyed cordial relations with Afghanistan. The latter's

refusal to recognize the Durand Line, and irredentist claims on Pakistani territory by successive Afghan regimes have been the root causes of this strained relationship.

The drifting of Pakistan and Afghanistan into opposing American and Russian camps in the 1950's further widened the gulf. Particularly disturbing to Pakistan was the Soviet Union's openly declared policy of supporting Afghanistan on the sensitive Pashtunistan issue.

Ironically, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, more than 3.5 million Afghans were brutally uprooted and forced to seek refuge inside Pakistan. Though it meant risking a direct confrontation with USSR, Pakistan never wavered in its principled stand and extended full support to the displaced Afghans. During the entire period of the Soviet occupation, Pakistan was not only heavily burdened by the massive refugee influx, but it also had to withstand Soviet pressures designed to coerce Pakistan into ceasing assistance to the Mujahideen.⁵⁵ These pressure tactics included cross border artillery and air attacks; terrorist bombings and assassinations inside Pakistan; stirring of ethnic and communal disputes, especially in the border provinces; and threats of escalation. Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., a former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan, commenting on the crucial role played by Pakistan, says,

...the steadfastness of Pakistan's support for the refugees and the resistance in the face of Soviet attempts to weaken Pakistan's resolve has been a major factor in making a Soviet withdrawal likely.⁵⁶

Indeed, by acting as refugee host, arms conduit, guerrilla refuge and Mujahideen political protector, Pakistan not only contributed heavily towards the Soviet withdrawal, but also determined the outcome of the United States policies in Afghanistan. However, it would be grossly incorrect to cast the Soviet withdrawal in terms of a Pakistani or even an American victory. War inside Afghanistan goes on unabated and the refugees have shown no inclination, whatsoever, in returning to their homeland for as long as the present state of anarchy exists in the country. Indeed, since the Soviet withdrawal, the security situation has worsened rather than improved for Pakistan.

The continued stay of the refugees is bound to create serious social and security problems for Pakistan. Pakistan spends \$1 million a day from its own resources to support the refugees. Additionally, tensions have erupted between the locals and the heavily armed refugees in competition for scarce economic resources, decreasing pastureland, and social status.⁵⁷ In some areas, the refugees, who have been termed as the largest single concentration of displaced persons in the world today, have even changed the tribal and sectarian equilibrium. In Baluchistan, the influx of 700,000 Pathan refugees threatens to change the numerical balance between the precariously placed Pathan and Baluch tribes, turning the latter into a minority in their own province.⁵⁸ In the

Kurran Agency of Northwest Frontier Province, the sectarian balance between the Shiite Muslim Turi tribe and the neighboring Sunni Muslim tribes had been completely disrupted, resulting in violent and bloody clashes.⁵⁹ Also associated with the refugees are the growing, twin problems of increased influx of unauthorized weapons and regular flow of drugs into Pakistan.

These tensions were exploited by the Soviets and the PDRA during the occupation years. However, the Soviets, stung by Pakistani intransigence and defiance, are expected to accelerate their efforts in destabilizing Pakistan through exacerbation of separatist tensions. As the late president Zia, commenting on the Gorbachev era said:

If anything, things have got worse in this respect since Gorbachev took over---the Russians are trying to browbeat us, destabilize us by creating rifts in our society.⁶⁰

During the occupation period, the Soviet policy of destabilizing Pakistan, though initiated in collusion with the DRA regime, was not followed through with full force for a variety of reasons: Afghanistan had not been secured; Pakistan's cooperation was required in signing of the Accords, thus legalizing and dignifying the Soviet withdrawal; and finally, the appeal of for the Soviets had decreased dramatically amongst the dissatisfied tribesmen of the NWFP and Baluchistan after witnessing or hearing

about the destruction inflicted by the Soviets within Afghanistan.

However, with the passage of time and especially with the departure of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the tribesmen may once again be receptive to future Soviet overtures. Over the years, the USSR has meticulously cultivated a number of dissident elements from the NWFP as well as Baluchistan. Khair Buksh Marri, a self-exiled Baluch dissident tribal leader, based in Afghanistan proved his loyalty to the Soviets by leading five thousand Marri tribesmen in active operations against the Mujahideen in Kandhar province in July 1987.⁶¹ The return of Marri to Pakistan has the potential of not only destabilizing Baluchistan province but also creating internal security problems for Pakistan.

In the NWFP, instances of frontier tribesmen being bought by Najibullah's lucrative offers of guns and gold have also been on the increase. An upward surge in this trend could prove disastrous for the Mujahideen who have to use the tribal territory when moving to and from Afghanistan.

The deliberate fanning of ethnic flames in Pakistan indicates that its dismemberment remains part of the Soviet long-term design. A weak tribal state carved from southern Afghanistan and Pakistan as 'Greater Baluchistan,' beholden to the Soviet Union for its independence and subsistence, would extend Soviet

influence directly to the shores of the Indian Ocean.⁶² Indeed, a Soviet sponsored Baluch state would provide the Soviet Union with a strategically vital coastline and ports (Jiwani and Gwadar) on the Indian Ocean, putting the Soviets in a position to threaten the gulf states and major oil routes.⁶³

Another possibility, more dangerous than Baluchi rebellion, is the complete division of Pakistan between an independent Baluchistan, Afghanistan and India, through a coordinated two pronged Indo-Soviet offensive.⁶⁴

Indeed, a successful execution of this scenario would satisfy all the three participants, Russia through Baluchistan, Afghanistan by absorbing NWFP Province, and India by annexing the remaining Punjab and Sind Provinces.

While Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have always remained strained, India is not only Pakistan's traditional enemy but has also fought three major wars with Pakistan since 1947. India considers Pakistan as a stumbling block in its aspirations to achieve the status of a predominant regional power and has always strived to correct the situation. As an Indian spokesman recently remarked, "The ambition of the new generation is simple, to make India the preeminent power of the second world by the turn of the century."⁶⁵ Though the Soviets have always allied themselves with the Indians, as is evident by the 1971 Peace and Friendship Treaty, India's importance under Gorbachev's new thinking has increased

tremendously. Under Gorbachev, Moscow has shifted its emphasis away from ideologically compatible states, which received major attention from the Soviet Union in the previous administrations, towards large, geopolitically important third world states.⁶⁶ As a U.S. State Department official recently remarked:

The practical implications of the [new Gorbachev] policy are evident in a variety of regions around the world, nowhere more so than in India--Gorbachev clearly views India as the centerpiece of his policy toward the developing world.⁶⁷

In pursuit of their policies towards India, the Soviets have been willing to concede India the position it has sought as the preeminent power in the sub-continent, and to accept, in principle, India's managerial role in the region as was recently observed in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Moscow, has also provided India with sophisticated weaponry as well as transfer of technology needed to manufacture state-of-the-art weapons.⁶⁸ Indeed, between 1976 and 1980, a period during which U.S. arms sales to Pakistan were reduced to a mere trickle and, even twice suspended over the nuclear proliferation issue, the USSR supplied 82 percent of Indian arms imports (\$2.3 billion). The value of Soviet weapons supplies to New Delhi since 1980 has been conservatively estimated by western arms experts at over \$4 billion. Considering the USSR as a security guarantee against both China and

Pakistan, India steadfastly refused to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁶⁹

Thus, the Soviets have the 'Indian Card' to play if the civil war intensifies and threatens the existence of their client regime in Kabul. The present explosive situation in the Province of Sind is indicative of an overall indigenous trend, albeit actively exploited and exacerbated by the USSR, India, and the DRA.⁷⁰ An all out war between Pakistan and Soviet backed India with concurrent flare up of Russo-Afghan inspired insurgency in Baluchistan could well have Pakistan fighting for its very existence.

The USA, though allied with Pakistan, has, pursued its own interests by attempting to woo the Indians from the Russian camp by improving ties and providing weaponry to India. As a result of the Reagan Administration's policy decision in 1984 to seek improvement of relations with India, the U.S., in 1986, granted India a license to buy top of the line General Electric F404 jet engines for its light combat aircraft (LCA) currently underdevelopment. In 1987, Washington sold to India a Cray XMP-14 supercomputer.⁷¹

Thus, Washington's efforts to win over India, through a direct contribution to India's program of military modernization, will certainly further increase India's existing military superiority over Pakistan. Thus, the Soviet withdrawal is bound to decrease the

importance of Pakistan in the eyes of the U.S. since the prime cause of U.S. support to Pakistan was the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, the Soviets hope that the United States will appraise the "new" situation in Central Asia as allowing, if not requiring, reduced American commitment to its only ally in the region.⁷²

The threat to Pakistan is real, and immediate actions must be taken to rectify the grave situation. The government of Benazir Bhutto is eager to avoid a protracted civil war in Afghanistan - a war in which Pakistan is necessarily implicated.⁷³ Pakistan has little to gain by continued instability in Afghanistan, and its priority with respect to Afghanistan is to stabilize its borders, work for a peaceful, political solution to the Afghan problem, so as to ensure the right conditions for the return of the refugees to their homeland. Indeed, the key to a lasting agreement on Afghanistan may be in the hands of the USSR and the United States, and Pakistan may well have to cooperate with both to attain that agreement.

IRAN

The presence of the Soviet military on the eastern flank of Iran had always been viewed by the latter as a potential threat. Despite the severe terrain restrictions presented by the 600-mile long Kavir and Lut deserts on the conduct of major ground operations in support of the

main thrust through the Elburz Mountains in the north, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan could not be ignored.

Indeed, during the occupation period, Soviet air power had been moved considerably closer to the Straits of Hormuz by the activation of air bases at Shindand and Farah. The Soviets also retained the capability of splitting Iranian defenses by opening two fronts simultaneously, the main effort from the north and a smaller diversionary effort from the east. The Soviet cultivation of Iranian Baluchis was another possibility which had to be taken seriously.

However, all these possibilities are to be regarded as part of a longer term Soviet strategic policy towards Southwest Asia. Again, action against Iran from the east could only be contemplated after Afghanistan has been fully secured so as to ensure uninterrupted Soviet lines of communications.

For the present, the withdrawal has greatly improved Soviet opportunities to influence Iran, which hosts eight Mujahideen parties and close to two million Afghan refugees. The relations had remained cool ever since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, with the major point of disagreement being the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Ideological differences formed another stumbling block. However, the Soviet Union was eager to fill the void left by the total disengagement of USA from Iran.

The turning point in Iranian-Soviet relationship occurred with the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Although, diplomatic exchanges had commenced in 1988, the high point was achieved by Speaker Rafsanjani's dramatic June 1989 visit to the Kremlin.⁷⁴

With the growth of Soviet influence in Iran, the Russians are hoping for positive Iranian influence on Shiite Mujahideen groups in Afghanistan to reach some sort of accommodation with the Najibullah regime. In the process the Soviets could further damage Mujahideen unity. Indeed, following his visit to Iran in August 1989, Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze in fact praised Iran's new 'realistic' position concerning Afghanistan, which echoes Kabul's call for a coalition government of "national reconciliation".⁷⁵

Thus, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan has not only improved Iranian-Soviet relations, but has also provided opportunities to the latter to use Iranian influence in fostering much sought after legitimacy for their client regime in Kabul.

CONCLUSION

The Soviet policy in Afghanistan, as a result of the withdrawal, is unlikely to experience radical changes. The strategic location of Afghanistan - as a key buffer state and, as an avenue for possible future Soviet expansion towards the Persian Gulf - cannot be ignored by Soviet policy makers. In the final analysis, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan does not mean abandonment of

Soviet goals in the region, but pursuance of the same policy objectives through more sophisticated, indirect and cost effective means.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ New York Times, January 23, 1989, p. A-5.
- ² Boston Globe, May 26, 1988, p. 5.
- ³ New York Times, January 23, 1989, p. A-5.
- ⁴ Colonel Thomas J. Kelly, The Soviet Afghanistan Experience as a Reflection of Soviet Strategic Culture (Study Project, U.S. Army War College, 1989), p. 59.
- ⁵ New York Times, March 30, 1988.
- ⁶ Alexandr Prokhanov, "Afghan Questions: A Writer's Opinion," Literaturnaya Gazeta, February 17, 1988. Translated in Soviet Law and Government - A Journal of Translations, Winter 1989-90.
- ⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, New York (United Nations), December 7, 1988.
- ⁸ Captain Kenneth L. Davison, Jr., USAF, "Geopolitics of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," Strategic Review, Winter 1990, p. 41. Collins put the total strength of Soviet Ground Forces at 4 percent, while Alex Alexiev in War in Afghanistan: Soviet Strategy and State of Resistance (DTIC, 1984), puts the figure at 2 - 2-1/2 percent.
- ⁹ Graham T. Allison, Jr., "Testing Gorbachev," Foreign Affairs, Fall 1988, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 19.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.
- ¹² David Holloway, "Gorbachev's New Thinking," Foreign Affairs, 1988-89, p. 66.
- ¹³ Francis Fukuyama, Gorbachev and the New Soviet Agenda in the Third World, June 1989, p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Allison, p. 21.
- ¹⁵ Holloway, p. 71.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 79.
- ¹⁷ Washington Post, 17 April 1988.

¹⁸ Rosanne Klass, "Afghanistan: The Accords," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1988, p. 930. General Mikhail Zaiksev, handpicked by Gorbachev, was given a year or two to start winning in Afghanistan.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Washington Post, 17 April 1988.

²¹ Klass, p. 932.

²² Congressional Record, Vol. 134, No. 21, 29 February 1988, p. S1608.

²³ Klass, p. 934.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 935.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 936.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 923.

²⁷ Davison, p. 42.

²⁸ Klass, p. 924.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 937.

³⁰ Barnett R. Rubin, "The Fragmentation of Afghanistan," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1988, p. 162.

³¹ Klass, p. 938.

³² Amstutz, pp. 294-295.

³³ Sir Geoffrey Howe, "Soviet Foreign Policy Under Gorbachev," World Today, Volume 45, Number 3, March 1989, p. 41.

³⁴ Marek Sliwinski, "Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People," ORBIS, Winter 1989, p. 69.

³⁵ Louis Dupree, Afghanistan as cited in James Rupert, Afghanistan's Slide Towards Civil War, p. 776.

³⁶ Oliver Roy, "Afghanistan: Back to Tribalism or Onto Lebanon," Third World Quarterly, October 1989, Volume II, Number 4, p. 73.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

³⁹ Rubin, pp. 153-154.

- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 154.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 155.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 156.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 158.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 159.
- ⁴⁵ Rupert, p. 769.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Washington Post, 29 August 1989, p. A-15.
- ⁴⁸ Rubin, p. 159.
- ⁴⁹ Rupert, p. 770.
- ⁵⁰ Rubin, pp. 160-161.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 162. U.S. assistance for the same period on a comparative level amounted to \$600 million.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 165.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 163.
- ⁵⁴ Ghulain Sarwar, The Pakistan Times Overseas Quarterly, 8 November 1987.
- ⁵⁵ Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., Gorbachev's Afghan Gambit, 1988, p. 14.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. vi.
- ⁵⁷ Imtiaz H. Bokhari, "The Great Game: Pakistan's Move," Defense and Diplomacy, Volume 3, Number 4, April 1985, p. 20.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Brook Shephard, Sunday Telegraph, 29 November 1987 as cited in Bodansky, p. 152.
- ⁶¹ Hussain Haqqani, Far Eastern Economic Review, 29 October 1987.
- ⁶² Davison, p. 42.
- ⁶³ Vertzberger, p. 65.

⁶⁴ Bokhari, p. 20.

⁶⁵ M. J. Akbar, New York Times, 3 August 1986.

⁶⁶ Mohammad Ayoob, "India in South Asia: The Quest for Regional Predominance," World Policy Journal, Winter 1989-90.

⁶⁷ Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy," Problem of Communism, Volume 36, Number 5 (September-October 1987), p. 7.

⁶⁸ Ayoob, p. 111.

⁶⁹ Robert G. Wirsing, "South Asia, the Arc of Crisis: Finally Wins the World's Attention," Defense and Foreign Affairs, February 87, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Yossef Bodansky, "Victim of the Great Game - The Tragedy of Pakistan," Global Affairs, Winter 1989, p. 154.

⁷¹ Ayoob, p. 113.

⁷² Davison, p. 42.

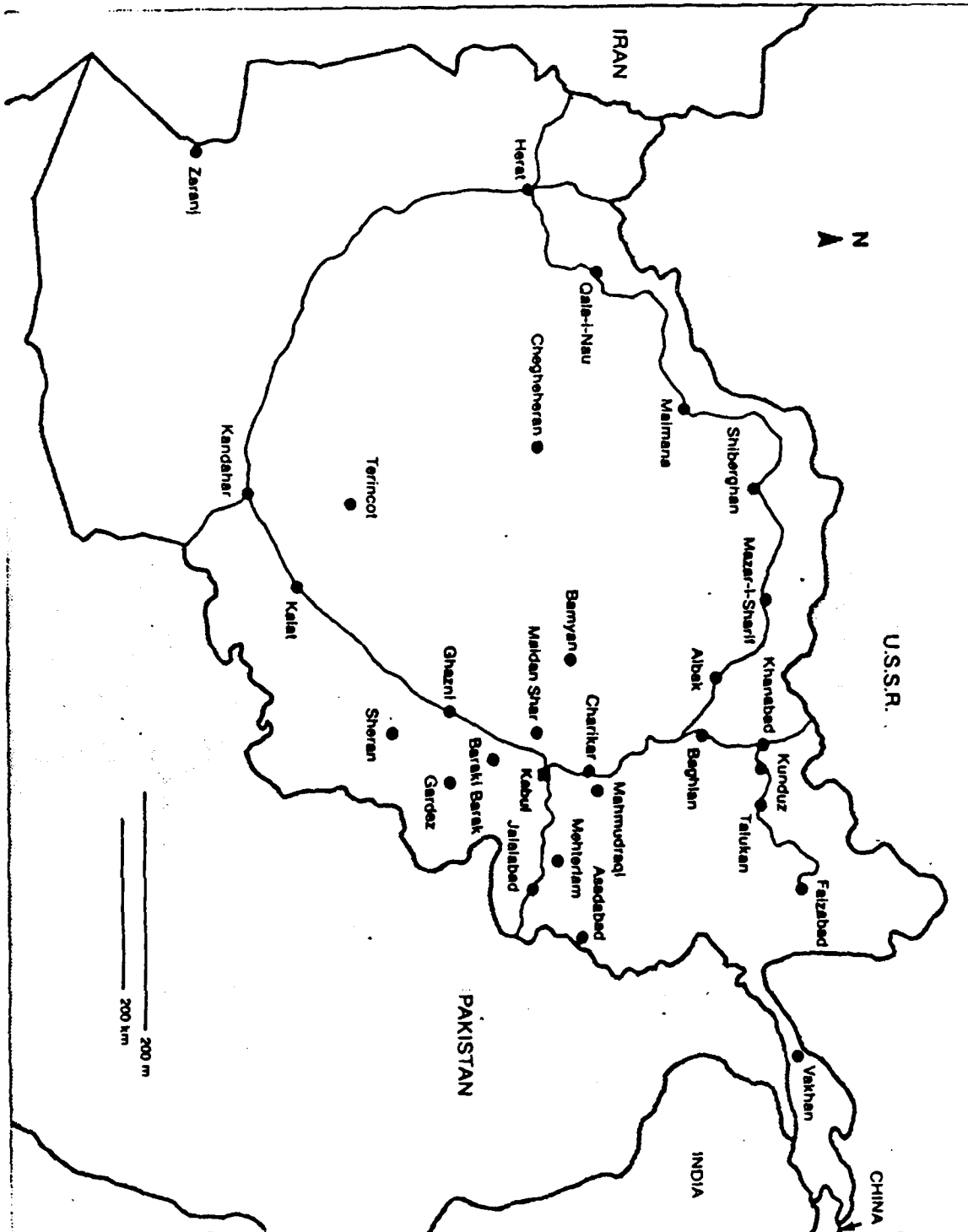
⁷³ Paula R. Newberg, "Pakistan at the Edge of Democracy," World Policy Journal, Summer 1989, p. 582.

⁷⁴ Davison, p. 43.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

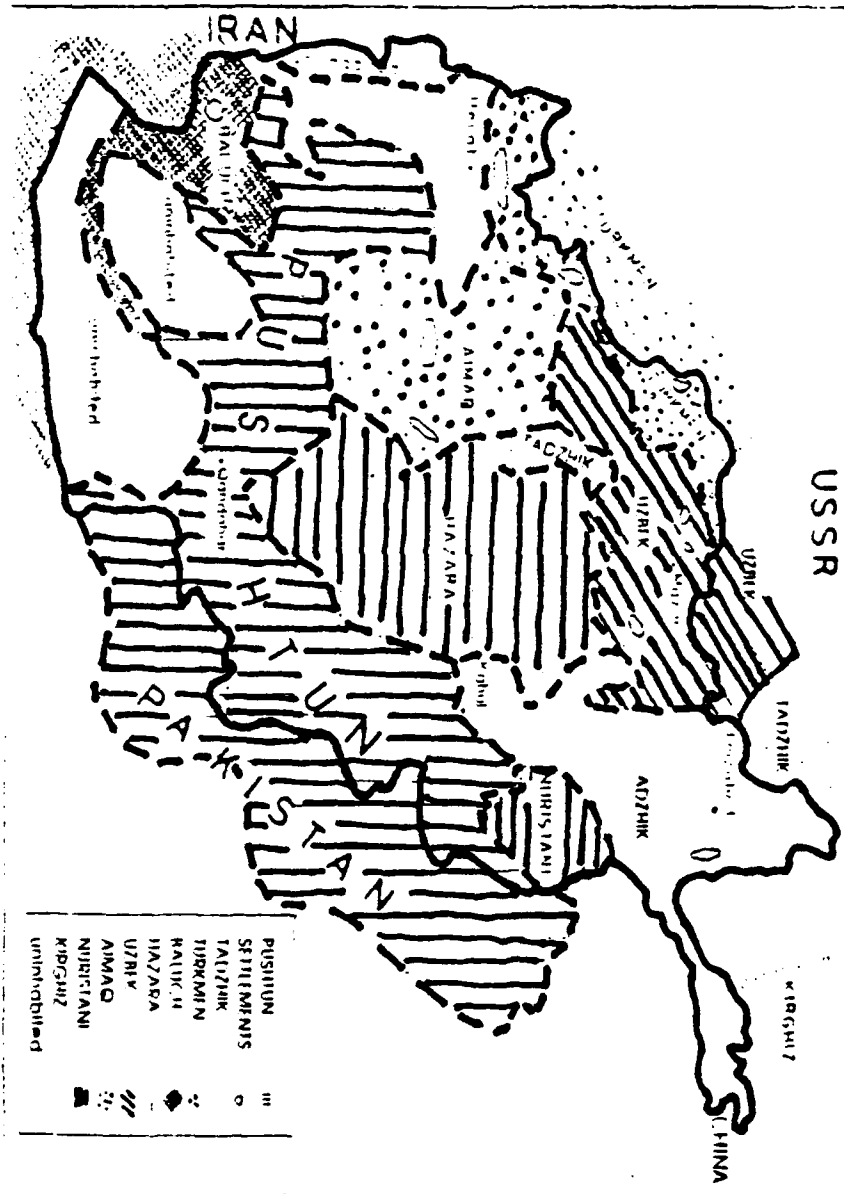
APPENDIX

AFGHANISTAN



Source: Maps on File, Facts on File,
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